

VOTING MACHINE FEARS • FIXING THE MEDICARE MESS

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

January 5, 2004

Door by Door

Progressives
hit the streets
in massive
voter outreach



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Corporate Medicare

The Medicare "reform" bill recently passed by Congress manipulates the cost and quality of health care provided to older Americans in order to maximize the profit margins of HMOs, insurance corporations and drug companies—the very same entities that poured money into congressional election campaigns. Such political contributions are of course legal—a legislatively sanctioned form of bribery that corrupts the democratic process.

In the case of the Medicare bill and its much hyped prescription drug benefit, this institutional corruption will prove lethal, literally, to seniors forced to choose between buying life-saving drugs and other of life's necessities—food, shelter, heat.

The role that the current campaign finance system played in the Medicare bill battle was the story behind the headlines. Consider the following information compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, the non-profit organization that tracks campaign contributions.

In the House of Representatives, pharmaceutical manufacturers, health insurance corporations and HMOs gave, on average, \$59,366 to the 204 Republicans and \$50,336 to the 16 Democrats who supported the Medicare bill. Conversely, the 25 Republicans who opposed the bill got \$27,226 and the 189 Democrats who voted "no" received \$28,323. In the Senate the 54 senators that voted "yes" received \$111,266 on average, while the 44 who voted "no" received \$76,019.

In total, the drug companies, the health insurance industry and HMOs spent \$18,799,678 buying yes votes in the House and Senate, a figure that more than offset the \$9,296,419 they "lost" investing in those elected officials who voted "no." Considering that the Medicare bill provides these same business interests with \$125 billion in direct subsidies, it was a small price to pay.

Corporate America knows that money buys votes in Congress, an awareness borne out by the fact that corporate-related donations to candidates for federal office and the two political parties increased from \$275 million in the 1990 election cycle to more than \$1 billion in the 2002 election cycle, an increase of 366 percent.

And Americans realize that, at some level, money counts more than their vote, as reflected

in increasing voter alienation and decreasing voter turnout. In essence, corporations, through their donations, not only buy legislation, they buy a political climate of voter self-disenfranchisement that is equally valuable.

Complicit in this erosion of democratic society is a mainstream media that rarely connects the voting record of members of Congress and the amount they are "paid" by the corporations in whose interests they vote. According to a search of the Lexis-Nexis news data base, not one mainstream publication or broadcaster in its coverage of Medicare vote examined the connection between corporate contributions and the bill's passage, even though that information was readily available from the Center for Responsive Politics.

And let's not let the American Civil Liberties Union off the hook. It continues to regard monetary contributions to candidates as a free speech issue, thereby undermining efforts to counter the corrupting influence money has on the democratic process.

McCain-Feingold was supposed to fix the excesses of the campaign finance system, but

Corporations not only buy Congress, they buy a political climate of voter self-disenfranchisement.

the cure has been illusory, proving that those campaign finance reformers pursuing a strategy of publicly funded campaigns, as championed by the group Public Campaign in a number of states, were correct in their critique of half measures like McCain-Feingold.

Lacking true reform, the one bright spot is that the McCain-Feingold limits on funding political parties have, in the case of the Democratic Party, shifted financial power away from the Democratic National Committee (and by extension the Democratic Leadership Council) and into the grassroots. Progressives are now investing in organizing not just to throw the rascals out of office but to build enduring political communities that sustain themselves by bringing people together in the realization that in the end it is the voter, not money, that counts—and that the promise of democracy is one thing that cannot be bought.

—Joel Bleifuss

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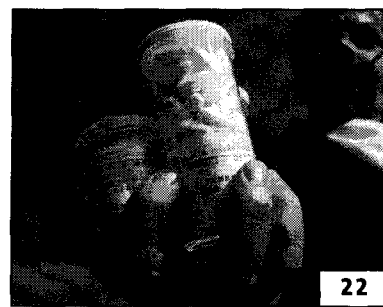
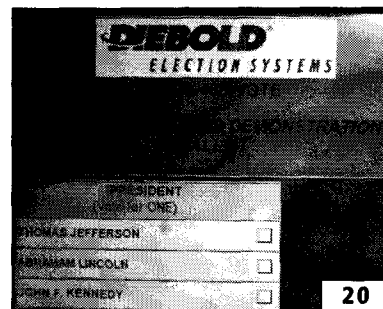
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By John R. MacArthur

Senator Robert Byrd battles against empire.



Unclear Diagnosis

I would like to commend Annette Fuentes and *In These Times* for your excellent article on thimerosal-containing vaccines ("Autism in a Needle?" December 8). I would like, however, to correct one mischaracterization contained in the article. My son is described in your article as "autistic." This description is not accurate.

My son has never been diagnosed with the label "autistic." Although he does have serious neurodevelopmental and biomedical problems, including speech regression, the psychologist who originally evaluated him told my wife and I that he "didn't know why" he had these problems. In areas such as social relatedness he did not meet the criteria for autism or related diagnoses as set forth in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV, promulgated by the American Psychiatric Association.

The label autism is all too freely used and is, sadly, misapplied to many children who have developmental disorders. Leo Kanner, the psychiatrist who 60 years ago first described the disorder and coined the term "autism", later derided the label as a "pseudodiagnostic wastebasket" for disorders that are not understood.

Some health professionals do not correctly identify neurodevelopmental diseases and dump kids with these disorders into convenient diagnostic categories. The disorders are complex for sure, but the children are not afflicted with psychiatric or behavioral disorders, but rather a constellation of overlooked physiologically based diseases.

Contrary to conventional medical wisdom, children labeled "autistic" but who have heavy metal intoxication, mercury poisoning or other environmentally triggered disorders can be helped through biomedical intervention. I am witness to the fact that these so-called alternative treatments work: While it has been and will continue to be a long haul, my son is recovering.

Tragically, many children and their families who are part of the epidemic of neurodevelopmental disorders plaguing our country do not have access to biomedical intervention due to financial and professional barriers. This circumstance shamefully illustrates the urgency of getting to the bottom of this national and global disaster.

Robert J. Krakow
New York

Fight the Swill

Thank you, Susan Douglas, for communicating so clearly and forcefully the anger and frustration I feel every time I read one of these "trend" stories ("Post-feminist Swill Redux," December 8).

You did a great job of pointing out the inequities and attitudes that make mothers who work in the home feel that mothers who work outside the home are the enemy (and vice versa), when we should be working together to create better lives for ourselves and our children.

Sonya Booth
Chicago, Illinois

Join *In These Times* staff, local labor activists and community members 7 p.m.-10 p.m. January 24 for the opening night of *Solidarity Forever! Graphics of the International Solidarity Movement*.

This historical exhibit presents posters from the last 30 years covering diverse urban and rural struggles by groups that range from farm workers and miners to janitors and teachers. The show also highlights celebrations of International May Day and features posters by Chicago artists.

The evening will include speakers, hors d'oeuvres, beer and wine.

For more details on *Solidarity Forever!* and other upcoming *In These Times* events, send us an email at chicagoevents@inthesetimes.com. If you don't have email, please call Tracy Van Slyke at 773-772-0100 ext. 243 and you will be added to the call list.

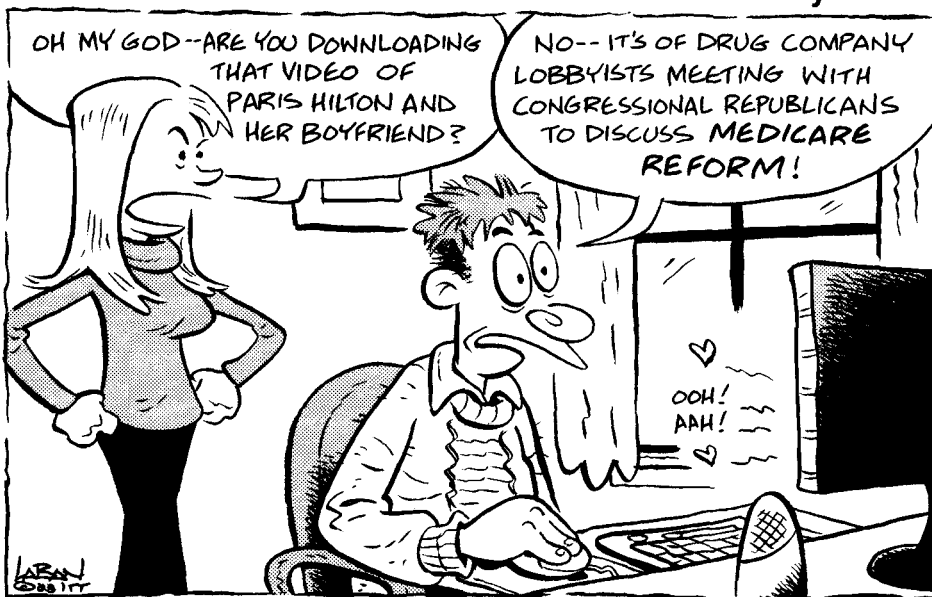
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Terry LaBan



We Aren't the World

Bills tie area studies funding to national interests

By Laurie King-Irani

Already-strapped institutions of higher learning are facing an ideologically driven effort to limit funding for the study of cultures outside the United States.

For nearly four decades, American universities have benefited from the U.S. Department of Education programs funded under Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Title VI provides grants to nurture area and international studies centers and aims to create national resources for teaching foreign language and supporting research and training in international studies and world affairs. But these programs are under threat as neoconservatives seek to place conditions on continued funding.

Title VI reauthorization already has passed the House and is expected to be taken up by the Senate in January. Differences in the bills will be hammered out in conference—a process not open to the public.

"This legislation represents the thin end of the wedge for political interference with the curriculum," says Rashid Khalidi, the Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University's Middle East Institute. "It is meant to provide a highly partisan, ideological litmus test for academics."

Among the most alarming provisions of the House bill, known as the International Studies in Higher Education Act, are:

- **Section 5**, which establishes an International Education Advisory Board to advise the government on Title VI programs in relation to homeland security, international education, international affairs and foreign language training.
- **Section 8**, which requires reporting to Congress foreign language communities of U.S. residents or citizens, particularly those deemed critical to U.S. national security.

Two members of the International Advisory Board would represent "federal agencies that have national security responsibilities" and the board would make recommendations "to improve the programs under this Title to better reflect the national needs related to the homeland security."

Although all area studies are under scrutiny, Middle East studies programs in particular have received the most vituperative critiques from neoconservatives calling for a radical rethinking of Title VI. Given that the United States is now engaged in a "War on Terror" in Iraq and Afghanistan and has undertaken global surveillance of Arab and Muslim communities, this is not surprising.

"If implemented as its proponents intend," Khalidi says, "it would impose the pseudo-sciences of terrorology and the demonization of Islam and Muslims as integral parts of teaching and research about the Middle East, and could have even wider implications."

Yet the neoconservative assault on Title VI is based on logical fallacies, most notably that any critique of U.S. foreign policy constitutes an attack on U.S. national interests, that area scholars are anti-American and that the programs turn young minds toward unpatriotic thoughts and away from national service. The changes also could prove dangerous to researchers in the field, who already face suspicions that they are agents of the state rather than independent scholars.



Conservatives claim that the works of scholars like the late Edward Said dominate Middle East studies.

"This is an apt example of how academic freedom and civil liberties are eroded in the name of 'emergency,'" says Jean Comaroff, Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology and of Social Sciences at the University of Chicago.

"In fact, if current conditions illustrate anything at all, it is the need to counter American parochialism with precisely the sort of knowledge about other languages, cultures and perspectives that Title VI centers have enabled in the past," Comaroff says. "Now more than ever, the freedom of their investigations should be nurtured, not curtailed." ■

Laurie King-Irani is an anthropologist at the University of Victoria, British Columbia.

Many scholars, especially those studying the Middle East, are concerned that the conditions attached to Title VI funding will stifle academic freedom. They encourage everyone concerned with these issues to contact members of the Senate committee on Health, Labor, Education and Pensions: Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), John Edwards (D-N.C.), Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), Jim Jeffords (I-Vt.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Jack Reed (D-R.I.), Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Bill Brydges (R-Tenn.), Michael Enz (R-Wyo.), Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), Kit Bond (R-Mo.), Mike DeWine (R-Ohio), Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), John Ensign (R-Nev.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), and John Warner (R-Va.). Visit www.internationalstudies.com for links to free web sites.

Goons Over Miami

It's the police, not the protesters, getting violent

By Cynthia Moothart

At the November protests against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations, Police Chief John Timoney and the Bush administration's Department of Homeland Security launched a violent assault on American democracy.

With \$8.5 million supplied from the famous \$87 billion allocated for the War on Terror, thousands of officers from the Miami-Dade Police Department and several federal agencies, including the DEA, the ATF, INS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, were armed with weapons ranging from tear gas to tazer guns, rubber bullets and water cannons.

The police unleashed these weapons against a parade of AFL-CIO marchers

and a few thousand other activists, whose most militant ambition was to repeat the symbolic victory of Quebec City by pulling down a large "anarchist-proof" wall surrounding the hotel in which negotiators were meeting. These same forces also were used to prevent busloads of protesters from disembarking and to detain marchers attempting to leave downtown.

Observers have characterized this response as an act of desperation: Since thousands of activists shut down WTO meetings four years ago in Seattle, the FTAA has been in a tailspin, threatened by nonviolent global uprising. And it is clear that the "Miami Model," as law enforcement officials are calling this overwhelming response, had goals beyond keeping the peace.

Seeking to control spin, Timoney "embedded" reporters from mainstream media outlets in police operations. The demonstrations, already defined as protesters against police, took on the look of warfare as TV correspondents appeared on camera in flak jackets and riot helmets.

Police propaganda efforts also sought to draw distinctions between assembled labor union members and unaffiliated activists and warned of supposed protester tactics, such as squirting acid and urine on officers and bystanders.

The mainstream media, embedded in this newest war, provided jingoistic coverage equaled only by their efforts in Iraq: Local anchors made such claims as "everything is going according to script," and labeled the protesters "rabble rousers," "anarchists" and "bad seeds," among other things.

Such efforts were nothing new. Timoney was among the first to employ these strategies during protests at the Republican National Convention in 2000 when he was chief of police in Philadelphia. In an effort to discredit and dehumanize protesters, he waged a pre-emptive public relations strike. With helicopters flying above, police teams swarmed a warehouse where activists were assembled to make puppets, resulting in numerous arrests. In press briefings police representatives also suggested that protesters had sought to release poisonous reptiles in the city. The story, and others like it, was false, but that made no difference: The authority of the chief of police ensured that each made banner headlines.

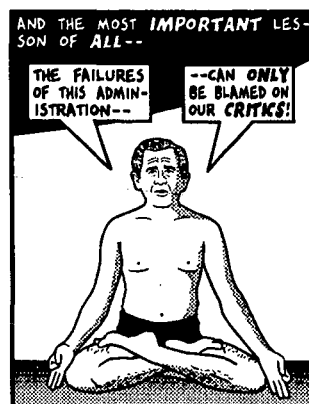
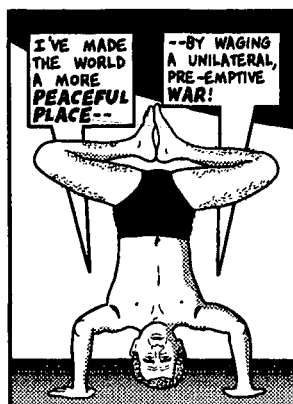
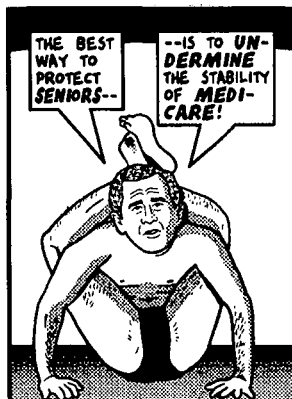
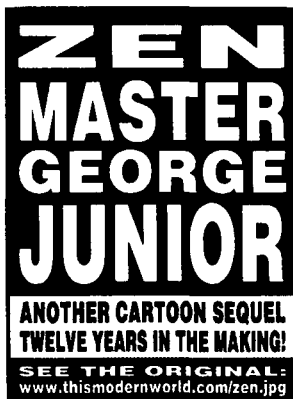
Despite the overwhelming negative TV and newspaper reports, polls after Philadelphia revealed that most Americans still had a positive impression of the protesters. And after Miami the Steelworkers demanded that Timoney be fired and Amnesty International called for an investigation into police tactics.

These events suggest that efforts to control the public's perception are never guaranteed, even when the equivalent of a state-run news agency stands behind them. But the Bush administration has another chance to get things right—and has already hired a big gun for next year's Republican National Convention in New York, timed to coincide with the 9/11 anniversary. Jim Wilkinson, former director of strategic communications at U.S. Central Command, has been brought on to oversee media operations—and has promised another round of embeds to get the job done. ■

Wire services contributed to this report.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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Cry Haiti

Trouble brews as country heads toward bicentennial

By Kevin Y. Kim

Haiti celebrates its 200th anniversary in January. But the majority of citizens of the Western Hemisphere's second-oldest democracy still face shorter lives, subsist on less than \$1 a day, and struggle, jobless, in a country sliding toward disorder, isolation and permanent penury.

"Haiti's verged on crisis more times than I can count," says Merrie Archer, human rights director for the National Coalition for Haitian Rights. "This past year alone, it's courted catastrophe any number of times, yet reaches the brink and pulls back again and again."

In 2000, the country held legislative elections partly challenged by international monitors who quit the country without overseeing the presidential reelection of populist firebrand Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Since then, Haiti has been stuck in political gridlock, unleashing a cycle of violence that has left the hands of government partisans, opposition figures and lawless thugs equally bloodied.

On October 26, a girl riding a bicycle in the northern town of Gonaives died from a stray bullet during an attack by antigovernment forces on a police station. One month later, Aristide partisans fired on a crowd of protesters outside a courthouse in Petit-Goave, wounding a 2-year-old. As Haiti's political crisis worsens, such tragic events increasingly become everyday incidents—in the past two months, violent demonstrations have left at least 15 dead and dozens wounded.

Critical independent reporting in Haiti largely has disappeared. Since 2000, about 30 Haitian journalists have gone into exile. The murder of its most prominent, outspoken journalist Jean Dominique, remains unsolved in the burgeoning docket of a judiciary powerless to stop spreading human rights abuses. Already 146th in the world in human development and the poorest country in the Americas, Haiti is the region's second-most dangerous country for journalists,



A demonstrator demands the removal of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from power.

according to the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

The growing crisis coincides with Aristide's long-delayed promise to hold elections in November and December. Not only are Haiti's peace and development at stake, but more than \$500 million in foreign aid frozen by the international community in response to the 2000 elections—including millions of dollars in direct U.S. aid to the Haitian government, which direly needs to bolster its democratic institutions.

Many observers, including U.S. officials, regard Aristide's ability to conduct free and fair elections pivotal to Haiti's problems and future international support. But that narrow focus ignores the inability of the recently formed Haitian National Police (HNP) to ensure safe elections that include the political opposition. After a promising start under U.N. auspices, the HNP's abandonment by a fickle international community in the mid-'90s led to its corruption and politicization by competing government factions.

"I'm not sure Aristide has total control of the country," says Robert Maguire, a former State Department staffer and leading Haiti expert. "There are deeply ingrained political habits in Haiti that, if

not Aristide himself, then many around him have fallen captive to." Louis Joinet, a recent U.N. envoy to Haiti, has reported that the HNP is demoralized by its inability to enforce significant rule of law, with some high-ranking officers simply quitting.

Unsurprisingly, as of press time the Haitian government had yet to announce an elections timetable. Instead of taking tension-reducing steps within its power, Aristide's government seems content to muddle through for now. Either way, it's unclear if Aristide can appease an intransigent opposition—partly composed of former authoritarian and elitist elements with disturbing ties to the International Republican Institute, a D.C.-based advocacy group influential in Bush administration circles. Unlike Aristide, the opposition lacks popular support and seems more bent on ousting Aristide and destabilizing Haiti than reaching any electoral compromise.

"The government and opposition need to put their money where their mouths are and come up with a viable program for the country," Archer says.

After three years of an inconsistent, hands-off approach leaving Haiti policy strongly driven by special interests, the Bush administration is showing signs of a closer engagement with Haiti that could facilitate a much-needed breakthrough. Recent bilateral cooperation over narco-trafficking and refugee migration—two of Washington's primary concerns—has led the Bush administration to reiterate U.S. support for Aristide, appoint a high-level envoy to study the ongoing crisis and approve \$202 million in multilateral loans.

But simply giving aid, shunning Aristide or holding rushed, one-sided elections are unlikely to stem Haiti's downward spiral. Equal, sustained pressure must be brought by the U.S.-led international community against Aristide and the opposition to finally put Haiti's suffering people ahead of their mutually destructive self-interests.

"Aristide's no devil, but no angel either," Maguire says. "But instead of Bush's past estrangement policy or Clinton's soft love stance, we need a tough love policy holding everyone accountable." ■

Kevin Y. Kim is a writer in New York.

From Protest to Politics

When war begins progressive work doesn't end

By Jeff Epton

George Bush and his policies may have precipitated the most widespread political ferment in the United States in more than a generation. With the Patriot Act and tax cuts for the rich, the invasion of Iraq, the assault on forests, waterways and clean air, and the passage of a prescription drug bill with the potential to destroy Medicare, the Bush administration has created more

unity among elements of a once-disaffected majority and helped mobilize a coalition that may defeat him in 2004.

Labor unions and civil rights, environmental and feminist organizations head the list of usual suspects already preparing for 2004 (see Page 14). And regional organizations with growing political sophistication will play a large role in the election outcome as well (see Page 18). But entirely new to the mix will be so-called "peace and justice" voters, rarely addressed by any candidate and almost never connected to the nitty-gritty of electioneering.

In Chicago, peace and justice voters have discovered a new determination to be relevant to the outcome of elections locally, regionally and nationally. Under the umbrella of Chicagoans Against War and Injustice (CAWI), the Regime

Change Voter Registration campaign is picking up steam. Led by Carl Davidson and Marilyn Katz, two perennially engaged '60s veterans and ex-SDS members, CAWI began as Chicagoans Against War with Iraq. But as the war transformed from invasion to occupation, CAWI activists managed to avoid splits over sectarian and strategic differences, and committed to stay together and move from "protest to politics," as Davidson puts it.

With a decentralized structure connected primarily through the internet, CAWI's constituent groups, like Hyde Parkers for Peace and Justice, DuPage Against War Now and North Shore Peace Initiative, the group has begun training and certifying deputy voter registrars who will fan out into neighborhoods, community colleges and shopping centers to reg-

Country Manners 5.2

Aggressive dogs are bad for neighborly relations, so when his pit bull/Rottweiler started preying on passersby, Oklahoma man Joseph Dabney decided it was the right thing to do to have the unruly beast castrated. Unfortunately Dabney chose an unorthodox method for removing the offending 'nads. He removed them with a .12-gauge shotgun. According to thesmokinggun.com, the hound survived the operation, and Dabney was arrested.

Volk Festival 3.9

Give them the merest pretext to don their clogs, kilts and lederhosen in public, and the troopers of ethnic culture will turn out in droves. With this in mind, some enterprising neo-Nazis in St. Louis invited all comers to Eurofest 2003. According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, more than 60 folk performers responded to a flier inviting them to perform at a celebration of traditional music, dancing and food.

Bagpiper Matt Pantaleoni figured something was wrong when he noticed men prowling the

audience bedecked in Waffen SS tattoos. The National Alliance, which organized the extravaganza and even duped the German Cultural Society of St. Louis into hosting it, was apparently using the event to recruit new members. According to the *Post-Dispatch*, the neo-Nazis and their new recruits met the next day in a suburban community center to discuss the Jewish media, election strategies and "the major role played by race in human intelligence."

The Master Race In Action 1.3

Jeffery S. Murr, 24, of Tennessee came to grief during his induction to the Ku Klux Klan, reports the Associated Press. Murr was ritualistically blindfolded and tied to a tree with a noose, whereupon Klansmen shot him with paintball pellets. To add a frisson of menace to the proceedings, Klansman Gregory Allen Freeman fired a handgun into the air. The bullet returned to earth by way of Murr's cranium, critically injuring him.

Lord Make Me Pure, But Not Yet 3.4

A leading local decency crusader has added a little spice to Louisville's police blotter. John W. Riddle, vice chairman of COMPASS, an anti-porn organization, was arrested after picking up a prostitute. The 65-year-old gentleman was reported to be packing Viagra. "I've known Mr. Riddle for a long time, and this is the last thing that we would have expected to happen," Barbara Davis, a colleague at COMPASS, told the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. "It just goes to show that even good men ... can get pulled into this pornography stuff."

Once We Were Dipshits 4.7

In what he claims was simply a Halloween lark, Michael D. Johnson, a

sophomore at the State University of New York at Oswego, disrupted a Native American studies class dressed in an Indian head-dress, and brandishing a bow and suction-cup arrow. After letting loose something like a war cry, according to *Newsday*, Johnson nailed instructor Kevin White in the chest with the arrow. White, an Akwasasne Mohawk, was anguished and no doubt a little perplexed when Johnson yelled, "Go back to your own country!" Police arrested the youth but so far have declined to lay charges of hate crime, perhaps in consideration of his impressive ignorance.



around the Chicago area.

But the project will do more than register voters. The deputy voter registrars also will be identifying voters sympathetic to the group's antiwar message. "We practice affirmative action," Davidson says. "We go where young people are, we go where people of color are, we go where working people are."

Once registered, new voters go into a data base maintained by CAWI that includes their phone numbers and a + if they positively responded to the regime change message. "We'll register Republicans, if they want to be registered, but we won't turn them out come Election Day," he adds.

Katz and Davidson say the group is agnostic in regard to a choice among Democratic candidates, but most members of CAWI have a personal choice. "We have Dean supporters, we have Kucinich supporters, we have Kerry

supporters in CAWI," Katz says. "But the differences between them don't divide us. We are focused on registering, educating and mobilizing."

CAWI activists say beating Bush is just the beginning. They are focused on building organizations and making more permanent change. "This process will create activists," Davidson says. "They'll be there after the campaign is over and some of them will be working on the changes in the election process, like proportional representation and preferential voting, that will really make a difference." ■

For more information about Regime Change, contact Sonja Koehler at pjvoter2004@yahoo.com

Carl Davidson is one of the founders of CAWI.

ister, educate and mobilize voters under the banner "Regime Change Begins at Home." So far, CAWI has trained more than 200 registrars and just recently begun staffing voter registration tables

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How to Fix the Medicare Mess

By Ben Peck

The Medicare overhaul legislation that Congress passed just before Thanksgiving does too much to help special interests and too little for the seniors and people with disabilities who rely on Medicare for their health care.

If Congress had been designing this legislation with people in mind, it would have added a drug benefit to the original Medicare program and insisted that Medicare negotiate directly with the drug companies for low prices on their drugs.

Unfortunately Congress only considered human need after it addressed the demands of the drug industry, the insurance industry and those ideologically zealous Congressional leaders who would like Medicare, as older Americans have come to know and rely on it, to wither on the vine.

First, Congressional leaders ensured that the legislation did not offend the drug companies—major patrons of both major political parties, but overwhelmingly generous donors to the Republican party.

The drug companies' primary concern is protection of the high prices they charge in the United States. Dutifully, Congress included a provision in the legislation prohibiting Medicare from using the market power of its 41 million members to negotiate lower prices. The cost of that provision: \$139 billion in additional profits to the drug industry over eight years.

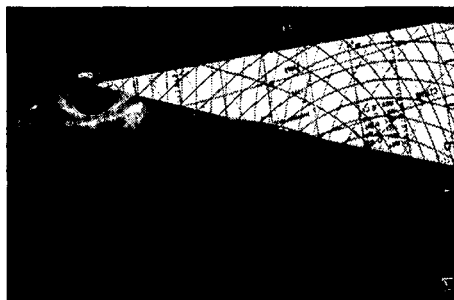
Next, the legislation had to appease the ideologues who insist that private health insurance plans be given a greater role in the Medicare program. Since private plans have recently been leaving the Medicare program in droves, the only way to lure them back was to pay them—big time. The 10-year cost of luring private plans back into Medicare: \$12 billion in new subsidies on top of \$67 billion in existing subsidies. Somehow we have a Congress saying that we save money by paying for-profit insurers about 25 percent more than original Medicare to provide coverage.

The ideologues argue that people with Medicare need more opportunity to enroll in private plans and that private plans will be a powerful new tool to control the costs of the program. They

believe both of these claims in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Dollars directed to drug companies or private insurance companies are dollars drained from health benefits, including coverage of prescription drugs, for people with Medicare.

After the second round of tax cuts enacted earlier this year, White House funding for a Medicare drug benefit already



was too little to provide comprehensive coverage. But after Congress attended to the interests of the drug and insurance industries, there was even less. The result is a drug benefit that many will find meager.

For most of the 41 million people with Medicare, the benefit would cut off once a person's total drug costs reach \$2,250 and would not start again until their drug costs hit \$5,100. That means that many people who depend on prescription drugs to control their blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes or a host of other medical needs will be unable to afford their medicine come July or August. For some, the erratic nature of the benefit may be more dangerous than no coverage.

What is more, the benefit gets much worse as drug prices rise in the future. In 2013, the eighth year of the program, those with the largest drug costs would be responsible for approximately \$5,000 in drug costs. The legislation will be a huge step backward for millions of people with better coverage from their employers who will drop that coverage as a result of the passage of this legislation. For the poorest of the poor, the legislation offers worse coverage than they currently enjoy from their states' Medicaid programs.

However, for some, the legislation does offer real benefit. The near poor would enjoy enhanced benefits and once people's total drug costs reach \$5,100 the legislation offers generous coverage, paying 95 percent of costs. However, even the coverage for the low-income is limited by an assets test, which would mean that half of those eligible would not get the benefit because they would not be able to surmount the bureaucratic barriers to coverage.

The willingness of zealots to attack the program's fundamental character represents a relatively new development in Medicare, which enjoyed broad bipartisan support for most of its first three decades. This changed in 1994, when Newt Gingrich and other ideologically driven crusaders came to power in Congress.

Voters now need to hold the members of Congress who passed this bill accountable. They need to vote them out of office in 2004 and send back to Washington a Congress that will fix this mess.

A new Congress should start by passing legislation that focuses on the needs

Congress considered human need only after placating the drug and insurance industries.

of people with Medicare. The government should be given not just the power, but the mandate, to negotiate directly with the drug companies for lower prices.

Congress should enact legislation imposing prescription pricing parity with Canada. U.S. citizens should not pay double the prices for life-saving medicines that citizens in Canada and the rest of the industrialized world pay.

Message to Congress: take away the Christmas gifts for the drug and insurance industries and, for once, make the health of older and disabled Americans the national priority it deserves to be. ■

Ben Peck is the Washington Policy Director at the Medicare Rights Center.

Dissing Dubya

By Susan J. Douglas

As you know, many of us are more outraged over this presidency than perhaps any other (which is saying something). We're also exasperated with the Democratic Party which, our dreams of Green aside, is currently the only lot that can possibly get these theocrats out of office. But as we're learning from the mainstream media, whose latest negative news peg about Howard Dean is that he's too "angry" to be president, we're not supposed to display our fury over Team Bush's multiple crimes. Angry just doesn't go with the PR-driven, entertainment-oriented nature of modern campaigning. At the same time, as "The Daily Show" reminds us every night, Team Bush does provide America with many laughable moments. I mean, really, that Baghdad photo op of Dubya with the roasted turkey looked exactly like something you'd see in *The Onion*. ("The turkey has landed," quipped the front-page headline in the *London Independent*.) So, if "angry" is out, then let's get happy and start making a lot more fun of our Emperor wannabe.

As I understand the hint Dean and others are being given by the pundits, the various candidates hoping to run against Bush need to lighten up and be not so, well, serious. While most of us feel that fury is exactly what is called for at this moment, ridicule and condescension often can be more powerful than indignant attacks. Recall how well they worked for Reagan when he kept chiding Walter Mondale, as if he were an adolescent, with his dismissive mantra "There you go again." The more Bush struts around with queens and dons flight jackets and other military apparel, the more mockery he invites—and needs.

Here's my proposal. Inspired by Nicholas D. Kristof's "Name That War" contest in the *New York Times*, which produced fabulous nominees such as "Operation Bushwack Iraq" and "Bushkrieg," I'm putting forward a similar contest to rename a host of Bush policies and, indeed, to offer some new nicknames for that lover of nicknames, Bush himself.

The idea is to get the Democrats to stop attacking each other, to stop being so

lethally humorless, and instead to bandy about and debate the merits of the various titles and sound bites you all propose. In the process, maybe we can elevate Bush's derision quotient to its proper level.

Here are some categories to consider.

Name that electorate: Team Bush thinks that most Americans are morons. Any decent candidate will remind voters over



and over that Bush thinks they're too dumb (projection, perhaps?) to notice the difference between image and reality. Bush thinks that if he just jets into Baghdad for two hours and serves up some yams, that people won't notice that he killed a congressional proposal to increase the benefits to families whose relatives die in combat, that he proposes closing seven VA hospitals, and that some veterans have to wait two years for a doctor's appointment. (See Dave Lindorff's "Dishonorable Discharge" in the November 26 issue of *In These Times* and Graydon Carter's scathing editorial on Bush's record in the December issue of *Vanity Fair*.) He also thinks they won't notice that November saw the highest casualty rate since Bush invaded Iraq. His little cameo appearance is supposed to obliterate the fact that he won't attend the funerals of those killed in Iraq. So, behind closed doors, at his "beloved ranch" in Crawford, what do you think he calls us dumb stumps? We need something that conveys his true contempt for those he refers to in public as "the American people."

Nickname that president: Bush is like the proverbial used-car salesman, and certainly like the fraud posing as the Great and Mighty Oz, but both are way too hackneyed. Alfred E. Neuman already is overdone (though so apt). Molly Ivins has

given us "Shrub" and "Dubya," which convey the gaping mismatch between the man and his station, but neither captures his inveterate duplicity. So, next competition: What is a really great, derisive moniker for this PR poser, whose various photo ops seek to mask the fact that he's, well, a liar and a fool.

A subset of this category: Can we please have a nickname for him every time he dares to wear military gear and pretends he knows anything about serving in the armed forces?

Rename those "initiatives": Let's start with, for example, "Healthy Forests," "Leave No Child Behind" and the entire Iraq fiasco with its various "Operations." Team Bush has raised the rhetoric of inversion to a shameless new level, not of "double-speak," but "opposite speak." So, pick those initiatives, like PRIDE (Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone), e.g., the new welfare "reform" proposal that increases the number of hours recipients—including single mothers with kids under the age of 6—have to work to get assistance. Or take a crack at the "Medicare Modernization Bill."

Rename those backdrops: You know the ones I mean, designed by former TV producers that say things like "better care, more choices" and cover the wall behind Bush as he announces some program (like the new Medicare) that does just the opposite of what the backdrop says. The name should capture the "subliminal seduction" efforts here.

While I believe that Howard Dean—and anyone else labeled as too "angry"—should say "Yes, I am angry" and explain why, given millions of Americans are, in fact, "angry" too. This deluded, self-important, arrogant administration requires vigorous deflation. Not only are they trying to steal our foreign policy, the courts, the environment and the constitution, they are actually trying to steal our language and its meanings. So dip those pens in acid, and get to work. ■

Please post all submissions to the "Comments" section of this column at www.inthesetimes.com.

Farrakhan and the Beefs of Rap

By Salim Muwakkil

Television viewers could be forgiven for rubbing their eyes in dismay when they happened upon a conversation between Minister Louis Farrakhan and rap star Jeffrey "Ja Rule" Atkins on November 3. Right there, on BET's most popular youth show "106 And Park" (and later broadcast on MTV), a septuagenarian leader of an ascetic religious group was breaking proverbial bread with a popular rapper whose favorite word seems to be "murder."

The pairing was not as bizarre as it seemed. Nation of Islam leader Farrakhan and hip-hop go way back. The minister believes that hip-hop artists have a profound impact on African-American life and culture. The respect is mutual; Farrakhan's voice has been popping up on rap records since the genre's earliest years and rappers ranging the spectrum (from "conscious" to "gangsta") often speak his praises on record and off.

Growing concerns of runaway violence being fueled by feuding hip-hop artists prompted the minister's prime-time appearance. In early October, hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons asked Farrakhan to help mediate a simmering and increasingly dangerous "beef" between Atkins and Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson. He asked if the effort could be recorded to amplify its national impact and Farrakhan agreed.

A spirit of aggressive competition has been integral to hip-hop music from its inception. Historians of the genre note that the rap music, break dancing and graffiti "tagging" that comprised hip-hop's formative elements were created in part to sublimate the violence plaguing the neighborhoods that gave it birth. Some of the earliest rap hits featured so-called battle rhymes. The spirited rivalries in the 1980s of KRS-ONE vs. MC Shan, LL Cool J vs. Kool Moe Dee, or U.T.F.O. vs. Roxanne Shante, kept fans glued to their radios to catch the latest "dis" records. But rap's critics and fans both fear that the battle rhymes and beefs have gotten out of hand. Hip-hop (now embodied primarily by rap music) no longer seems concerned with sublimation.

As Exhibit A in the case against these dissing contests, commentators often

point to the still-unsolved murders of Tupac Shakur on September 7, 1996, and Christopher "Biggie Smalls" Wallace on March 9, 1997. The two rap icons' transformation from friends to bitter rivals triggered an East Coast-West Coast feud that fueled deadly animosities in communities already crippled by excessive violence. That experience made it clear to observers that rap beefs sometimes have



deadly consequences beyond the recording studio.

In 1997, Farrakhan gathered a group of hip-hop artists and activists in Chicago to call a truce in the destructive beef that likely took the lives of Wallace, Shakur and countless others. He said at the time that hip-hop often got a bad rap for reflecting what society would prefer to hide, but that artists also had a responsibility to be balanced in their portrayals.

Farrakhan's recognition of hip-hop's cultural validity was unique among old school black leaders, most of whom dismissed the genre as a faddish and vulgar aberration. Many analysts blame those clashing verdicts about the music's value for a growing generational divide within black America.

At a hip-hop summit two years ago in New York City, Farrakhan urged performers and record executives to be more responsible for the effect of their words. He said hip-hop artists were black America's new leadership. "One rap song from you is worth more than 1,000 of my speeches," he told the crowd. "Will you accept your responsibility as a leader?"

Farrakhan was called back into the fray by fears that the Ja Rule/50 Cent

clash could become deadly or trigger wider feuds. Atkins agreed to meet Farrakhan first and, according to a Nation of Islam spokeswoman, Jackson also has agreed.

Atkins complained to Farrakhan about intense public pressure to keep his beef with Jackson hot. "The public makes it so that we have to keep assaulting each other," Atkins said. He said wanted to write other kinds of lyrics but the "public started to give me ridicule."

Farrakhan urged Atkins to lead rather than follow the public and teach them that there's more to life than beef. He also condemned the record companies for encouraging conflicts between artists. His most salient point, however, was that enemy forces are closely watching hip-hop culture.

"A war is about to come down on the rap community," Farrakhan said during the nationally televised conversation. "When you and 50 throw down, it goes all the way down into the streets," he added.

"The media takes the beef between you and 50 and they play it, they jam it, they keep it going," Farrakhan told Atkins. "Why would they keep something going

Farrakhan's recognition of hip-hop is unique among old-school black leaders, most of whom dismiss it as a vulgar aberration.

that could produce bloodshed? There is a bigger plot here, Ja, and this is what I want you and 50 and our hip-hop brothers and sisters to see."

This line of argument is a familiar one for Farrakhan, who has long warned that black youth are being demonized by popular culture in order to weaken the black community. He contends the demonization process that has filled U.S. jails and prisons with nearly a million black people is being aided by hip-hop's gangsta posturing. Many viewers were astounded to see this argument being pushed in prime time.

Hip-hop has produced some odd juxtapositions, but none beats Farrakhan on MTV. ■

Take Bush Home, Country Roads

By Craig Aaron

With its pundits and pollsters, bloggers and blowhards, Washington might be the worst place from which to gauge the political mood of the country. So when I need a political reality check, I head for West Virginia.

Mr. and Mrs. J—my grandparents—live in a small town near the Ohio River, a God-fearing, flag-waving, camouflage-wearing kind of place. Mr. and Mrs. J grew up poor, but now they're retired and comfortable. They've got a satellite dish and an RV with walls that expand. They still cook the green beans with bacon (especially tasty for a kid raised Jewish—they're my stepmom's folks).

There's never been a confederate flag in the back of their pickup, but let's just say we don't necessarily share the same views of guns, gay marriage or the Great Society.

So imagine my surprise when I was greeted at the door on Thanksgiving not with a hug or a drumstick, but a diatribe. Mrs. J handed me George W. Bush's "résumé"—a four-page laundry list of the president's deceptions and dubious achievements that circulated recently in cyberspace. (Sample line: "I have removed more freedoms and civil liberties for Americans than any other president in U.S. history.") Though not the first time I'd seen it, this was last place I'd expect to find it.

Then Mr. J spoke in hushed tones about how "dangerous" the president had become. Theirs weren't the voices of the "angry left"—with their giant puppets, hemp jackets and crazy socialist visions. A copy of *Field and Stream* sits on their coffee table. These two watch "Touched by an Angel." They have *quilts*. If they've decided to back anybody but Bush in 2004, it's a good sign.

Bush won West Virginia in 2000 even though the state is home to twice as many registered Democrats as Republicans. The Dems took West Virginia for granted—and when the race got close, the GOP tarred Gore as a tree-hugger who was going to take away their guns. Neither of my grandparents voted for Bush last time (hell, they've never voted Republican). But they do share similar views and values with many of their neighbors who did.

Karl Rove should be concerned. West Virginia didn't prosper that much during the Clinton boom, but it is definitely feeling the brunt of the Bush bust. With neither the factory jobs nor the National Guard units sent abroad coming back anytime soon, the president is vulnerable.

In my Thanksgiving dinner straw poll, no individual Democratic contender had made much of an impression. But our



conversation confirmed that if they hope to take back West Virginia and the White House, the Democrats need a nominee who can appeal to the angry left and the exasperated middle. Pass the mashed potatoes. Hello, Howard Dean.

That's not just the tryptophan talking. Some Republicans are saying the same thing. In a convincing strategy memo titled "Why Dean Can Win," Oregon-based political consultants Hans Kaiser and Bob Moore warn their GOP colleagues not to underestimate the Vermont governor: "We are whistling past the graveyard if we think Howard Dean will be a pushover."

Kaiser and Moore recognize that Dean projects an authenticity that other high-profile Democrats—including Al Gore and Hillary Clinton—all lack. "The difference between Howard Dean and the rest of the Democrat candidates is that Dean comes across as a true believer to the base, but he will not appear threatening to folks in the middle," they wrote in September. "More than any other candidate in the field, he will be able to present himself as one who cares about people (doctor), who balances budgets (gover-

nor), and who appears well grounded while looking presidential."

Their back-of-the-envelope electoral calculations suggest Dean would be a contender. They reason he should be able to take the 13 traditionally Democratic states and the District of Columbia where Gore won handily in 2000—including New York, New Jersey, Illinois and California. That would give Dean a base of 183 electoral votes. Kaiser and Moore predict Bush will easily recapture 24 states in the South and West, representing 206 electoral votes.

That leaves 13 states—and 149 electoral votes—up for grabs. Kaiser and Moore consider nine of those states—including Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin—to be "Democratic-leaning." The other four—Florida, Missouri, New Hampshire and Ohio—favor Bush. Based on these figures, Kaiser and Moore show that Dean could rack up 270 electoral votes even without winning Florida. To do so, he would have to win every state Gore did in 2000 plus two others: Nevada and West Virginia.

At the very least, this scenario raises serious doubts about the dire predictions of

The Democrats need a nominee who can appeal to the angry left and the exasperated middle. Pass the mashed potatoes. Hello, Howard Dean.

a McGovern- or Mondale-scale landslide if Dean secures the Democratic nod. Rove is concerned enough about West Virginia that Bush already has visited the state a record five times during his presidency. He spent Fourth of July 2002 just a few miles down the road from Mr. and Mrs. J. You can bet some of that \$200 million war chest Bush is amassing will be spent inundating the state with TV ads.

Dean can't expect much help from the bumbling Democratic establishment or the spineless Senate leadership. Still, as I reach for one last spoonful of Cool-Whip, I can't help smiling at the idea of Jessica Lynch's home state tipping the race.

Pie-in-the-sky dreams? Tastes more like a just dessert. ■

THE FIRST TO

By Joel Bleifuss

Neuromarketeers

Researchers at Emory University Hospital have been conducting neuromarketing experiments on human subjects in order to find the "buy button" in the human skull.

Emory's "thought scientists" use functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) "to identify patterns of brain activity that reveal how a consumer is actually evaluating a product, object or advertisement," according to the Bright House Institute for Thought Sciences Web site. "Thought Sciences marketing analysts use this information to more accurately measure consumer preference, and then apply this knowledge to help marketers better create products and services and to design more effective marketing campaigns." Thought Sciences, the world's leading neuromarketing firm, is a subsidiary of Bright House, an advertising agency whose clients have included Coca-Cola, Pepperidge Farm, K-Mart and Home Depot.

Thought Sciences boasts of having the "most-advanced neuroscientific research capabilities and understanding of how the brain thinks, feels and motivates behavior." Consequently, the company can help corporations "establish the foundation for loyal, long-lasting consumer relationships." In short, Thought Sciences intends on "revolutionizing the marketing industry" by discovering how to "motivate consumers to behave rather than just pique their interest." Such knowledge would allow corporations to design advertising campaigns that will "drive their target audience's behavior."

The cost for hiring Thought Science to scan the brains of 30 subjects with fMRI is \$250,000. For that money, the client



buys the expertise of Thought Sciences "chief researcher" Clinton D. Kilts, vice-chair for research at Emory's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. Kilts appears uniquely qualified to find ways to "drive" human behavior. He is an expert in addiction, having previously done research on "drug craving induced by mental imagery of drug use-related scenes." He has experimented on monkey brains, delving into primate amygdalas, the "primitive" hot spot of the subconscious mind that responds to sex, danger and emotion. He also has done work on human brains, coauthoring an article titled "Ecstasy and agony: activation of the human amygdala in positive and negative emotion."

In an interview with Forbes.com, Jordan Grafman, a neuroscientist at the National Institutes of Health, said, "There may be certain combinations of

itches [corporations] can use to appeal to the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex [the thinking part of the brain]."

Commercial Alert, a marketing watchdog group, and a number of prominent psychologists have written Emory University President James Wagner asking him to stop the experiments. Their letter read in part: "Universities exist to free the mind, and enlighten it. They do not exist to find new ways to subjugate the mind and manipulate it for commercial gain. ... Is Dr. Kilts now using his knowledge of addiction to sell products such as Coke? Is he working on mental mapping to induce product cravings through the use of product related scenes?"

And has Bush's focus group overseer, Karl Rove, eager to find ways to activate the human amygdala for political ends, employed the services of Thought Sciences? So far the company has one client, which it refuses to identify.

Can You Spell Blacklist?

The Young Conservatives of Texas has drawn up a "watch list" of 10 University of Texas professors who use their power as educators to "indoctrinate" students (www.yct.org). The professors listed on the Spring 2004 Watch List include:

- Journalism Professor Robert Jensen, who in his Critical Issues in Journalism class, "introduces the unsuspecting student to a crash course in socialism, white privilege, [and] the 'truth' about the Persian Gulf War."
- African American Studies Professor Edmund Gordon, who in his African-American Culture class, teaches "how blacks were and are oppressed, which would seem to deprive students of other important elements of black culture."
- Government Professor Jennifer Suchland, who in her Race, Class & Gender class, has students read articles that "greatly accentuate oppression and exploitation in the United States along race, class, and gender lines. If you believe in the American Dream and that the United States is a land of great opportunity, nothing in the readings from this class will confirm that belief."
- Slavic Languages Professor Thomas Garza, who in his The Vampire in Slavic Culture class, "referred to President George H.W. Bush as '...you know, the President Bush that was actually elected,' thus making the implication that the current President holds his office illegitimately. ... He arrogantly offered these remarks as if they were simply a matter of common knowledge."
- Sociology Professor Gretchen Webber, who in her Introduction to the Study of Society class, doesn't "advocate much of a role for an individual's free will."
- Government Professor David Edwards, who in his International Relations class, "'highlights' articles from the *New York Times*."

Can You Spell Privatize?

In the three years since President George W. Bush moved to Washington, his Department of Education has provided \$77 million in federal grants to pri-

vate groups working to introduce a voucher system of education. This money, allocated from the No Child Left Behind appropriation, included \$14 million to K12, a private company founded by former Reagan Secretary of Education William Bennett.

People for the American Way discovered this covert funding of right-wing organizations when analyzing the Department of Education's grantmaking process. "As the Bush administration has closed the tap on education funding, even abandoning much of its commitment to 'No Child Left Behind' and other critical education programs like IDEA and Headstart, money is flowing to private, pro-voucher advocacy groups," said People for the American Way President Ralph Neas. "This administration is sending millions of taxpayer dollars to groups that have been built by an interconnected network of right-wing foundations dedicated to privatizing education in America."

A Three-Letter Word

On November 11, Marcus McLaurin, a 7-year-old boy at the Ernest Gault Elementary School in Lafayette, La., was waiting to go out for recess when a classmate asked him about his mother and father. Marcus told his friend he had two mothers because his mother is gay. Another student asked what gay meant, and Marcus told them, "Gay is when a girl likes another girl." His teacher overheard this conversation and scolded Marcus, telling him that "gay" was a "bad word" as she sent him off to the principal's office. As punishment, Marcus had to go to school early for a week and repeatedly write, "I will never use the word 'gay' in school again."

Sharon Huff, Marcus' mother, told the Associated Press: "I was concerned when the assistant principal called

and told me my son had said a word so bad that he didn't want to repeat it over the phone. But that was nothing compared to the shock I felt when my little boy came home and told me that his teacher had told him his family is a dirty word."

The ACLU has taken up the case.

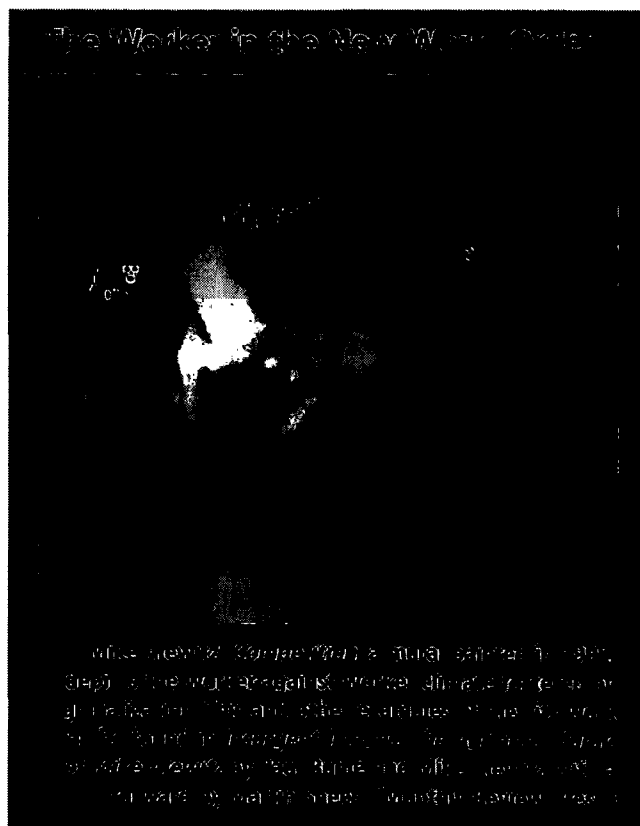
Say What?

The Britain-based Plain English Campaign has awarded Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld the Foot in Mouth Award for 2003.

On February 12, 2002, Rumsfeld told a press briefing:

Reports that say something hasn't happened are interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns — the ones we don't know we don't know.

John Lister, a spokesman for Plain English Campaign, had this to say: "We think we know what he means. But we don't know if we really know." ■





Door Door Progressives the streets massive outreach days

Coming Together and America Votes, created after McCain-Feingold to circumvent the ban on soft money. Named for the section of the tax code that regulates them, these progressive 527s—nearly all funded and organized by traditional Democratic allies such as labor, environmental and reproductive rights groups—can raise huge sums of unregulated money for voter education and registration so long as they do not advocate for a specific candidate.

The party that sticks together

Issue advocacy and voter contact in an election year is nothing new, but never before have progressive groups come together to coordinate their efforts, pool their resources and collectively execute the program. Although the organizational structure binding the half-dozen largest 527s is to a certain extent ad hoc, most of the groups are staffed by the same pool of veteran political organizers and headquartered in the same office building at 888 16th St.—across the street from the AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C.

Each 527 has a specific geographic or demographic niche. America Coming Together, which with a projected budget of \$98 million is the largest, is looking to register and educate Democratic-leaning voters in 17 battleground states. Partnership for America's Families is focusing on registering minority voters in swing state urban centers like Cleveland and St. Louis. And Voices for Working Families is working on registering and contacting black, Latino and women voters in other hotly contested areas such as Dade and Broward counties in Florida.

Alongside groups that will manage and execute the field operations are a few 527s, like America Votes, dedicated solely to coordinating these efforts.

"We want to make sure everyone isn't knocking over each other in the same neighborhoods," Richards says. "It's a big

Election Day is a year away and the Democrats don't yet have a presidential nominee, but for labor activists, environmentalists, pro-choice advocates and other progressives, the battle for the White House is well under way.

About a dozen groups—backed by the likes of EMILY's List, the AFL-CIO, the Sierra Club and MoveOn.org—are quietly building an infrastructure to undertake the most extensive door-to-door grassroots voter contact operation in U.S. history. Its potential to turn the election already is well understood on both sides: Longtime activists say they haven't felt this energized in decades—and Republicans are using congressional hearings to shut down the operation or steal directly from its playbook.

"It's never been done before on this level," says Steve Rosenthal, the former political director of the AFL-CIO and current president of America Coming Together, a voter outreach group funded by EMILY's List, organized labor and private donors such as George Soros. "It's something that the parties should have been doing but were neglecting."

Cecile Richards, former chief of staff to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, is director of America Votes, a coalition of 24 progressive organizations that will be coordinating field efforts. She echoes Rosenthal and adds, "For me, personally, that's the best kind of politics, direct retail, engaging voters about issues. I think it's a really welcome change and emphasis."

These field operations will be supervised, coordinated and executed by these same dozen so-called 527s, such as Americans

country and there are a lot of voters."

Nearly all 20 organizations within the America Votes coalition routinely meet to share ideas and strategies. Richards says that groups with more experience, such as organized labor, have been mentoring units newer to the field: "It's an opportunity for those who are established to work with groups that are newer, that have more flexibility."

A few of the 527s plan to use their funds for media and advertising, but most will focus on getting out into people's neighborhoods and knocking on doors. "Everyone's learned their lesson from the 2000 election," says Aimee Christensen, executive director of Environment 2004, a 527 put together by a coalition of environmental groups. "A lot of money went into media and not into peer-to-peer contact and it wasn't effective because [TV] markets were overwhelmed. It increases the credibility of the information when it comes from someone in their community."

Turning off TV

Since the '70s, presidential campaigns have centered on raising the massive funds needed to buy expensive television airtime. This emphasis on big media and big money meant that the grassroots, person-to-person campaigning traditionally at the core of the Democratic Party's strategy fell by the wayside.

Political veterans now say that in this time of waning ratings and increased media saturation, TV ads no longer provide the value they once did.

"Really it's been the orthodoxy of campaigns for the last 20 years that money for TV is the whole ball game," says Dan Berwick, an associate at the grassroots consulting firm FieldWorks. "But you can't cut through all the schlock that's on TV, so you have to go for quality over quantity and that's why people are ending up on people's doors."

If door-to-door canvassing seems a throwback to the oldest and most basic kind of politicking, the technique has been radically updated. "We're doing a precinct-level analysis to figure out who the voters are we need to reach and then where they are and how we can talk to them," Rosenthal says. "We're using a pretty sophisticated Web-based voter data base and we're using Palm Pilots so we can load all of the questions to voters into the Palms and then take their responses and hot sync back onto the system at the end of the day."

By developing a detailed profile of each voter or potential voter's concerns, organizers can target messages with an unprecedented degree of specificity. "What I think you'll see is a significant amount of localization of message," says Laurie Moskowitz, former director of the National Coordinated Campaign and co-founder of FieldWorks. "We're not just talking about Superfund sites, but Superfund sites in your neighborhood."

The local message also will be combined with a local face, as groups look toward hiring canvassers from within the communities. Arlene Holt-Baker, who heads up Voices for Working Families, says she's hoping to channel the energy of local community activists angered by the war and the radical Bush agenda in their canvassing and registration efforts. "We are not sending people in," she says. "We really believe that the people who are on the ground, the ones who are interested in what's happening in their communities, are the best people to be going door to door."

Aside from updating their techniques, the field-oriented 527s are starting their operations earlier than ever before. "In 2002 you saw people paying attention to field, but they didn't start

early," Moskowitz says. "That's the biggest difference. The whole realm of activity and planning is going to be so different because people are backing up their timeline."

Service Employees International Union Local 1199 in New York announced that it would pay the salaries of 1,000 union workers to take a full year's leave from their jobs and spend the time canvassing in battleground states; America Coming Together began setting up field offices a year ahead of election day; and Voices for Working Families started knocking on their first doors in Florida in mid-November.

"We're going to have a year's worth of contact that is layered and meaningful," Rosenthal says, "as opposed to bombarding people with a lot of mail and prerecorded phone calls that they just turn off to."

This year's massive field effort is the culmination of years of efforts by Rosenthal and others to make grassroots politics the center of the left's political agenda. In the '90s, Rosenthal, then political director of the AFL-CIO, undertook a concerted effort to reassert labor's political influence by turning out more union voters. He began a program of sustained voter registration and outreach among union members, and the results were impressive. Between the 1992 presidential election and the election in 2000, the percentage of the electorate who were union household members increased to 26 percent from 19 percent. Over the course of the last eight years, 15.5 million non-union household voters dropped out of the electorate, but 4.8 million more union household voters were added.

"The lessons were pretty basic," says Rosenthal. "One, we found that when we talked to people about issues they cared about, they responded. Two, when you talked to people face-to-face, as close to where they live as you can get, they responded. Three, when you talked to them a lot over the course of several months, they responded."

Rosenthal applied what he learned to the 2000 presidential election, where labor's canvassing and voter contact operations helped Al Gore receive more votes than any other Democratic presidential candidate in history, and is credited with providing the margin of victory in a number of states that he won by less than 10,000 votes.

Grassroots arms race

The GOP, which has historically put far less emphasis on field operations, learned from the Democrats, and in 2001 initiated a massive voter registration drive among Republican constituencies. It also instituted the "72-Hour Project," a concerted get-out-the-vote operation that many Republicans credited with the party's success in the midterm elections and prompted Ralph Reed to boast that the "the story of 2002 is not that Democrats stayed home, it was that Republicans came to the polls in historic numbers."

"The Republicans weren't shy about the 72-Hour Project," says Amy Chapman, director of Grassroots Democrats, a 527 working with state parties to coordinate campaigns. "They said it was a page out of the Dems' playbook—and it was."

It wasn't the first time Republicans took their techniques from the Democrats (voter guides and direct mail also were Democratic innovations), but it stunned the party and hammered home Rosenthal's point: Aggressive field operations can win campaigns.

With just about everyone predicting that the 2004 election will be as close and bitterly contested as 2000, the stakes are even higher. "It's like a grassroots arms race," says Ruy Teixeira,

co-author of *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. "The Republicans turned up it a notch and now the Democrats recognize that they have to turn it up a notch."

The energy surrounding field efforts is palpable, and many veteran party activists and organizers who were critical of the ways in which the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act would end up handcuffing the Democrats now say that birth of the 527s has reinvigorated the party by moving money and manpower outside the Democratic National Committee and closer to activists. "There are some functions that historically the parties did that are going to fall to other organizations," Richards says. "If you look at what labor has done—increasing their share of the vote and focusing their efforts on direct contact with union members in the workplace, in their homes, on the phones—they've really demonstrated the impact of direct contact. You don't inherit a lot of the institutional baggage that anyone who runs the DNC or the state party has to deal with."

Palm piloting voters

Lurking in the background is the possibility that the soft-money ban, the central provision in McCain-Feingold that gave rise to 527s, might be overturned by the Supreme Court. If that were to happen, it would present progressive activists with a dilemma: collapse the infrastructures already erected into the DNC or forge ahead with the 527s.

The decision likely will rest on groups' fundraising prospects. So far the 527s haven't had much of a problem finding cash, thanks in no small part to billionaire financier George Soros, who has donated \$12 million so far to 527s and has pledged millions more.

Republicans and the right-wing press have seized on the Soros contributions as evidence that the Democrats are campaign finance reform hypocrites who have been bought. Drawing a distinction between his actions and theirs, Soros recently defended his decision on public radio's "Marketplace."

"I am contributing to independent organizations that are by law forbidden to coordinate their activities with political parties or candidates," Soros said. "I am not motivated by self-interest

'Our mission is to expand the electorate by registering hundreds of thousands of black, Latino, women and union voters, and there are way more of us than there are of them.'

but by what I believe is in the public interest. So when the Republican National Committee attacks me and distorts my motives I say the pot is calling the kettle black. You see, I'm different from their contributors. I'm not trying to buy influence. I'm acting out of the conviction that the Bush administration is leading us and the world in a dangerous direction."

Organizers agree with Soros, saying that that the goal of this sustained and sophisticated person-to-person contact with voters is not just to defeat Bush but to reconnect people with the political process.

"A lot of voters feel like you come a little too late and you take me for granted," Holt-Baker says. "With people of color and

women that tends to happen with one particular party."

"Both parties have so neglected their organization and their voters, and kind of insulted voters for so long, that people are just yearning for and dying for people to come talk to them again," Rosenthal says. "People are fed up with the political system as we know it and they're dropping out of it, and what we're trying to do is bring them back."

GOP wants Dems' blueprint

As heartening as it is for progressive groups to be pounding the pavement, one question remains: Will the effort work? The last mayoral election in Philadelphia provides a clue. In the three months leading up to the election, Partnership for America's Families, another 527 headed by Rosenthal, registered 86,000 new, mostly black and Latino voters. Democratic Mayor John Street won the election by 85,000 votes.

The histrionic reaction of the right is another good indication. In mid-November, Republicans lashed out at 527s, with RNC chairman Ed Gillespie writing letters to campaign finance watchdogs urging them to investigate groups like America Coming Together for violations of the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act. The same week directors of six progressive 527s received "invitations" to testify before the House Administration Committee chaired by Rep. Bob Ney (R-Ohio). Ney, who oversees the GOP's House incumbent retention program, said he was concerned that "organizations have been formed in the wake of BCFRA with the apparent intent of using soft money to influence federal elections—something the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act purported to ban."

Rosenthal, Richards and the rest declined to show, given that they weren't subpoenaed, and Rosenthal issued a statement saying: "It is clear that President Bush and the Republican Leadership are intimidated by the prospect of our registering, educating and turning out hundreds of thousands of progressive voters in 2004 so they'll do whatever they can to hamstring our operations and attempt to harass us. ... We will not be bullied by partisan abuse of congressional power."

Ney says he's now planning to subpoena Rosenthal and others to testify. Those in the 527 community have taken Ney's pledge as a sign that Republicans are desperate to get the details on the progressive 527s' plans so they can once again copy the model, if not shut down the operation.

The country's shifting demographics already favor Democrats who consistently win huge pluralities of the non-white vote, which is why Karl Rove has focused the GOP effort on registering 4

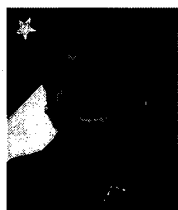
million evangelicals. But Rosenthal says that strategy can take the Republicans only so far. "The reason it will work better for our side than theirs is because our vote is more expandable," he says. "Our mission is to expand the electorate by registering hundreds of thousand of black, Latino, women and union voters, and there are way more of us than there are of them."

For Rosenthal, the effort isn't just about winning in 2004. "We're not talking about folding up our tents on November 10, 2004, and going home," he says. "The idea is to create a sustained program that we can build on well into the future." ■

Christopher Hayes is a writer in Chicago.

george w. bush

Bush bashing: It's pointless, immature, detrimental to civil discourse and counterproductive in luring those all-important "NASCAR Dads" we've heard so much about. But dammit if it's not good fun. So in a spirit of malevolent glee, here are the Democratic candidates, speaking harmoniously on the single issue that can truly unite a divided electorate: the follies and failings of our feckless flight-suit-in-chief. —Brian Cook and Ana Hristova



CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN

She has complained that the current administration is "spending money like a drunken sailor" and believes better, more accurate descriptions of Bush's "No Child Left Behind" program would be "No Child Left Untested" or "No Child Left with a Behind."

WESLEY CLARK

Clark has done an

about-face from his 2001 endorsement, given at a GOP fund-raising dinner, of "the great team in office, men like Colin Powell, Don Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice." While Clark may still be confused about the gender of Rice, he has since revised his opinion, calling the great team's foreign policy "reckless" and "irresponsible" and arguing that Bush's "axis of evil" was "probably the single worst formulation in the last half-century of American foreign policy."



HOWARD DEAN

Deriding Bush's tax cuts as a gift of "\$3 trillion for Ken Lay and the boys," Dean believes Bush pursues "Enron economics," which "is the equivalent of mortgaging your house to get

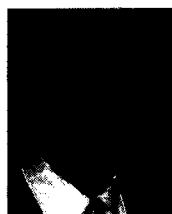
spending money for the weekend." Like Braun, he would change the name of "No Child Left Behind," his preference being "No School Board Left Standing."

JOHN EDWARDS

He has pointed out that while Bush may be fluent in Spanish, "the only Spanish he speaks when it comes to jobs is 'Hasta la vista.'" And Bush's health-care initiatives caused the senator to tell an audience "we ought to go to the White House and hang a big sign on the door ... that says, 'This president is hazardous to your health.'"

DICK GEPHARDT

The longtime representative has asked the obvious question, "How many Americans have to lose their jobs before George Bush loses his?" and was less than impressed with Bush's landing on the *U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln*, remarking, "If he really wanted to show us the state of affairs, he should have landed on a patch of quicksand."



JOHN KERRY

Many complain about his lack of humor, but Kerry recently brought down the house with this remark: "General Boykin has confused the heck out of the White House on all this talk about the Almighty. When he talks about the Almighty, the president thinks he's talking about Cheney, Cheney thinks

he's talking about Halliburton ... and John Ashcroft thinks they're talking about him."

DENNIS KUCINICH

As the only candidate who has offered to set up a Department of Peace, Kucinich usually avoids personal attacks and focuses his criticism on policies. His most bitter remarks came this past Labor Day when Bush decided to use Ohio as a photo op backdrop. After tremendously understating that Bush was "no friend of working people," Kucinich said, "I hope his tour of the state will include the empty factories and bankrupt corporations."

JOSEPH LIEBERMAN

Incredibly, the seemingly sober senator once defeated Christopher Hitchens in a celebrity stand-up contest. The following quip makes this a little easier to understand. "In the Bush administration, the foxes are guarding the foxes, and the middle-class hens are getting plucked. I want to make it clear I said *plucked*."



AL SHARPTON

After Bush's "Bring 'em on" taunt, Sharpton compared the president to "a gang leader in South Central L.A." If elected, he promised Bush a position "in the Bureau of Missing Persons

because he keeps missing everything he goes after." As for the infamous tax breaks, Sharpton thought they were "like Jim Jones giving [out] Kool Aid. It tastes good, but it'll kill you." ■

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Putting the 'Mass' in Massachusetts

By Frederick Clarkson

By reputation Massachusetts is the most Democratic state in the country, with good reason—its entire congressional delegation is Democratic, as are 171 of the state's 200 legislators.

Despite this overwhelming majority, many progressives have been disenchanted as conservative Democrats held sway. But after a decade or a retreat into the political wilderness they are now deploying innovative grassroots strategies that could reshape politics in Massachusetts—and provide a model for the nation.

"[Legislators] have failed to enact any of the progressive planks in the party platform, including universal single payer health care and clean electricity," says Leo Matar, a progressive union and community activist from Andover.

Rather than giving up and backing third-party protest candidates, Matar and other progressives are seeking to make ideological inroads by increasing their numbers within the Democratic Party. Their principal target now is the state's House of Representatives, where, they believe, a shift of 25 seats could be enough to make the House a decidedly progressive place. "If that happens it will be an earthquake," he says.

Three organizations epitomize this search for new ways to conduct politics and foster civic engagement: Neighbor-to-Neighbor, Boston Vote and Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts.

Neighbor-to-Neighbor

The Boston-based Neighbor-to-Neighbor organization began in 1996 after an analysis showed that 47 House districts ought to have more progressive representatives than they had. Using grassroots organizing, leadership development, electoral campaigns, legislative lobbying and voter registration and education, the group "built power" in low-income and working-class communities.

Neighbor-to-Neighbor now boasts an impressive record of turning around the problem of low levels of voter participation in lower-income urban communities. The group was able to dramatically increase 2002 voter turnout in low-income precincts of several cities: These included increases of 185 percent in Salem, 900 percent in Lynn; 210 percent in Leominster; 589 percent in Fitchburg; and 131 percent in Worcester. Such remarkable successes have contributed to the election of progressive candidates in several cities as well as two progressive democratic members of Congress, Rep. James McGovern of

Worcester and Rep. John Tierney of Gloucester. Sustained organizing by Neighbor-to-Neighbor in Worcester, Salem and Holyoke was credited as the deciding factor in the 2003 election of progressive, Latino city councilors in those cities.

"Since 1997 we have selected or swung a large bloc of the target legislators," says Executive Director Harris Grubman. He admits another 25 are needed to make the House a reasonably progressive place, but that goal is in sight. "There is nothing quite like the persuasive impact of seeing your colleagues go down."

Neighbor-to-Neighbor's success is based on "targeted organizing" in low-income communities around what it calls "The Working Family Agenda." As the group's Web site puts it, this agenda "finds jobs, education and training, affordable child care, health care and housing, and a welfare safety net"—is the cornerstone of their program. Neighbor-to-Neighbor's methods include year-round intensive voter contact and issue mobilization across the election cycle, followed by personal, telephone and mail contact during electoral campaigns. "With year-round voter engagement," Grubman says, "you change the equation dramatically. Most people devote so much attention to politics until the presidential campaign comes around."

Boston Vote

Another different and innovative model with electoral implications has been perfected by Boston Vote, a nonprofit, tax exempt organization founded in 1999 to encourage social service and other nonprofit agencies in low-income urban areas to register their clients to vote and help to turn them out on election day. Boston Vote is, in its way, targeting the same kinds of communities as Neighbor-to-Neighbor, but their main method has been to encourage nonprofit service organizations to integrate non-partisan voter registration and mobilization into their existing programs. Boston Vote and several participating agencies have received major foundation funding to develop a civic education program to increase voter participation among low-income communities of color. Some 140 groups participate in the program, of which about 50 are very active.

"We've gotten out the message that these nonprofits really depend on voter turnout in order to get their voices heard, to fulfill their missions and to receive continued funding," says George Pillsbury, policy director of Boston Vote. "What progressives have done over 30 years is set up good nonprofit organizations

that have grown out of various pieces of liberal legislation—organizations that the communities fundamentally trust.”

These efforts have ratcheted up voter participation in the targeted communities, Pillsbury says, which is responsible for the reelection of Felix Arroyo, a Latino Boston councilor. “Voter turnout in the black, Asian and Latino communities went up 80 percent, while [turnout in] the white communities went down 12 percent,” Pillsbury says. “Felix Arroyo came in second in a field of 5 [for four seats], because our precincts turned out.”

Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts

Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts (PDM) grew out of the 2002 gubernatorial campaign of former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich—whose spirited yet unsuccessful bid for the Democratic nomination attracted thousands of previously alienated and uninvolved progressives. After Republican Mitt Romney defeated Democratic regular Shannon O'Brien in the general election, some former Reich supporters decided to create a permanent progressive electoral organization that would continue to invite progressives into the party, and train leaders and activists with the goal of increasing the political and electoral power of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party.

PDM has quickly grown beyond the initial group of Reich supporters. Local organizing committees have been formed in a dozen towns and cities, including Gloucester, Lexington, Worcester, Springfield, Amherst and Williamstown. The secret of the group's success to date is the organizing method of PDM board member


Marshall Ganz, a former top organizer for the United Farm Workers who is now teaching at Harvard. Ganz's method focuses on one-on-one recruiting, the development of personal political relationships and leadership training—all aimed at expanding the pool of progressive voters and activists. According to fellow PDM leader Joan Lancourt of Boston Ganz's model is “based on the cumulative experiences and best practices of a long, proud history of American efforts at progressive organizing—the union movement, civil rights, the women's movement and a wide array of community-organizing approaches.”

While these initiatives hold great promise, they all have arisen from a resurgent progressive movement in the state and are building on the work of other organizations, notably the statewide Commonwealth Coalition. Its 22 member organizations of unions and women and environmental groups engage in more traditional electoral campaigns and have trained thousands of activists in the past 15 years. The coalition also was instrumental in creating a progressive caucus of state legislators.

Such efforts have made headway, but many progressives feel it's long past time to make Democratic values real in public policy.

“If we are going to have political party,” says Grubman, “it needs to mean something.” The next few years will be pivotal in determining what that will be. ■

Frederick Clarkson is a writer and lecturer based in Northampton, Mass., and is a member of the Interim Coordinating Committee of Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts.




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VOTING MACHINES GONE WILD!

BY MARK LEWELLEN-BIDDLE

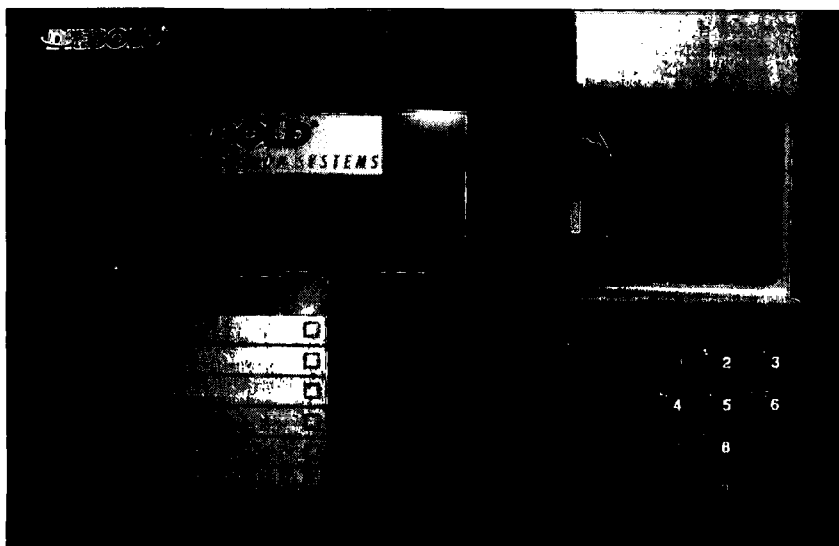
As the federally mandated deadline nears for state election officials to replace lever and punch-card voting machines with electronic systems, disturbing and systemic problems are emerging.

E-voting has obvious downsides—no ability to check recorded votes, no ability to perform meaningful recounts and susceptibility to electronic voting fraud. Nonetheless, the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA) mandates that by January 1 states submit plans to make the switch in time for the 2006 elections.

More troubling, the backers of the act and the manufacturers of e-voting machines are a rat's nest of conflicts that includes Northrop-Grumman, Lockheed-Martin, Electronic Data Systems (EDS) and Accenture. Why are major defense contractors like Northrop-Grumman and Lockheed-Martin mucking about in the American electoral system? And who are Accenture and EDS?

Until January 1, 2001, Accenture was known as Andersen Consulting, a part of Arthur Andersen. Despite having offshore headquarters, Accenture is a member of the U.S. Coalition of Service Industries (USCSI), an industry association that promotes vastly extending the privatization and free trade in services via the WTO and GATT. It also is a member of U.S. Trade, the coalition that pushed for fast-track trade authority. In February 2001, Accenture and election.com, the leading global election software and services company, formed "an alliance to jointly deliver comprehensive election solutions to governments worldwide. ... The companies will combine their strengths and experience in the development of election software and the use of technology to offer governments new efficiencies that aid election administration." Election.com also has a contract with the Federal Voter Assistance program to provide online absentee balloting for the armed services. It is expected to be completely electronic, that is, have no paper trail against which to check results.

This is worrisome because Accenture already has been involved



in scandals in the United States and Canada. In the late '90s, the company was hired to overhaul Ontario's welfare service for \$50 million-\$70 million. By 2002, the project was capped at \$180 million, although the total reached \$246 million. To meet its contractual agreement with Accenture, the Ontario government was forced to cut welfare payments to \$355.71 per child in poverty and fire large numbers of social service workers. Election.com also had problems in Canada. The company contracted to provide online Internet voting for the National Democratic Party in 2003, but hackers paralyzed the central computer and disrupted voting. The security and accuracy of election.com's voting software has since come under attack by Canadian voters who also challenged the ballotless software.

EDS, another internationally oriented information technology corporation, recently received a \$51 million subcontract from Sytel Inc, a software and service provider to the Army, Air Force and Dow Chemical, among others, to "support personnel systems including personnel management, hiring and job postings, employee training, job exchange programs and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint tracking for the Department of Homeland Security."

Partisan ties

Why Northrop-Grumman, Lockheed-Martin, EDS and Accenture have been hired to alter the election process in America becomes clear when personnel is considered. The three largest voting machine companies in America are Election Systems and Software (ES&S), Sequoia and Diebold. Like Accenture, they, too, have tarnished pasts.

ES&S, formerly American Information Systems, is owned by the McCarthy Group, which was founded in the '90s by Michael McCarthy, campaign director to Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) during the 1996 and 2002 elections. In a January interview with Bev Harris on talion.com, McCarthy said that "Hagel still owns up to \$5 million in the ES&S parent company, the McCarthy Group" and that "Hagel also had owned shares in AIS Investors Inc., a group of investors in ES&S itself." According to Harris, "Hagel did not disclose owning or selling shares in AIS Investors Inc." to the Senate Ethics Committee, "nor did he disclose that ES&S is an underlying asset of McCarthy Group." In an October article in the London *Independent*, Andrew Gumbel writes that Hagel "became the first Republican in 24 years to be elected to the Senate from Nebraska, cheered on by the Omaha *World-Herald* newspaper which also happens to be a big investor in ES&S." In what can only be called a glaring conflict of interest, "80 per cent (sic) of Mr. Hagel's winning votes—both in 1996 and in 2002—were counted, under the usual terms of confidentiality, by his own company."

Sequoia is the second-largest company, with roughly one-third of the voting machine market. In 1999, the Justice Department filed federal charges against Sequoia alleging that employees paid out more than \$8 million in bribes. In 2001, election officials in Pinellas County, Florida, cancelled a \$15.5 million contract for voting equipment after discovering that Phil Foster, a Sequoia executive, faced indictment in Louisiana for money laundering and corruption.

Diebold is probably the best known of the three because of its recent unsuccessful attempt to quash the release of thousands of inter-office memos over the Internet. The memos show that Diebold executives were aware of bugs in the company's software and warn that the network is poorly protected against hackers. The company also came under scrutiny because of voting irregularities caused by its machines in the 2000 election in Florida.

Diebold's CEO, Walden O'Dell is an avid supporter of George W. Bush and has come under attack for penning a fund-raising letter in which he promised to help deliver Ohio's votes to Bush in 2004. Diebold has been retained by the state of Maryland to provide voting software for the 2004 election, but because of ongoing negative publicity, Diebold hired Scientific Applications International Corporation (SAIC) of San Diego, to assess the security of the company's voting software.

But wait, there's more

Many SAIC officers are current or former government and military officials. Retired Army Gen. Wayne Downing, who until last summer served as chief counter-terrorism expert on the National Security Council, is a member of SAIC's board. Also on the board is former CIA Director Bobby Ray Inman, who served as director of the National Security Agency, deputy director of the CIA and vice director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. During the first Bush administration and while on the

board of SAIC, Immen was a member of the National Foreign Intelligence Board, an advisory group that reports to the president and to the director of Central Intelligence.

Retired Adm. William Owens, a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who sits on Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's Defense Policy Board, served as SAIC's president and CEO and until recently was its vice chairman. He now is chairman of the board of VoteHere, which seeks to provide cryptography and computer software security for the electronic election industry. Robert Gates, ex-CIA director, former SAIC board member and a veteran of the Iran-Contra scandal, also is on the board of VoteHere.

SAIC has a history of problems. In a 1995 article in *Web Review*, investigative journalist Stephen Pizzo notes that in 1990 the Justice Department indicted SAIC on 10 felony counts for fraud, claiming that SAIC mismanaged a Superfund toxic cleanup site. SAIC pleaded guilty. In 1993 the Justice Department again brought charges against the company for "civil fraud on an F-15 fighter contract." In May 1995, the company was charged with lying "about security system tests it conducted for a Treasury Department currency plant in Fort Worth, Texas."

It is not clear how SAIC became the company of choice to

AMERICANS ARE BEING RUSHED INTO THIS ELECTRONIC VOTING FRONTIER WITH LITTLE PUBLIC AWARENESS.

evaluate security standards of the voting machine industry. Under HAVA, Bush is required to establish an "oversight committee, headed by two Democrats and two Republicans, as well as a technical panel to determine standards for new voting machinery. The four commission heads were to be in place by last February, but [as of October 13] just one has been appointed. The technical panel also remains unconstituted, even though the new machines it is supposed to vet are already being sold in large quantities," Gumbel says.

Many computer experts agree that electronic voting represents the most feasible means of conducting large-scale elections, but not until security of the software can be established. But the voting machine companies want to retain secrecy over their codes as well as maintain control over the entire voting process, including the counting of ballots.

Most voting machines do not provide a paper trail so, in the case of a recount, all one can do is push a button and watch as the computer spits out the same set of numbers.

Americans are being rushed into this electronic voting frontier with little public awareness of the consequences. Diebold already has between 35,000 and 50,000 machines in place around the country. With the government investing nearly \$4 billion in voting machines, those who insist on ensuring that the system is secure have been shunted aside.

Perhaps this is how the administration intends to bring democracy to the world: Hold elections using voting machines supplied by Diebold, ES&S and Sequoia and elect friendly governments. Then, hope that those people who have never experienced the democratic process won't know the difference. More troubling is that many Americans may not know the difference, either. ■

Mark Lewellen-Biddle is working on his Ph.D. in American Studies and Political Science at Purdue University.



he new Medicare prescription law is a policy disaster. It offers a pittance or worse for most elderly, is a boondoggle for the drug and insurance companies, and threatens to privatize and dismantle Medicare itself. But because Republicans now can claim they delivered a prescription drug plan for seniors, political strategists in both parties regard it as a big boost to Bush's re-election bid.

But Bush's victory could be turned into a political albatross and help drag him into defeat next year if critics can get voters to focus on details, not sound bites. The president's Medicare plan could be used to show how Bush and the Republicans have sabotaged the public good and devoted themselves to corporate interests.

By catering to the rich and corporate special interests, Bush has made life tougher for the average American family. And his favoritism is not simply unfair—it's bad for the economy, bad for America as a community, and especially bad for low- and middle-income people.

A Medicare-focused attack on Bush could succeed for two reasons: The plan is complex and many seniors will be worse off than if there were no change in the law. For example, despite subsidies to corporations to continue prescription insurance, the

Congressional Budget Office concluded that 23 percent of retirees with employer-paid plans—or 2.7 million individuals—will lose those benefits and have worse coverage under Bush's bill. The poorest and sickest seniors will pay more because Medicaid won't pick up their costs, and hard-pressed states will face new bills for the very poor. In addition, according to the Economic Policy Institute, nearly half of seniors who have drug bills of less than \$810 a year may pay more than they now do. Stricken also is universal coverage, as Medicare previously provided, in favor of cost sharing and drugs that could vary according to region.

This backlash against Bush already has a firm foundation. Just before the congressional vote, a Hart Research poll showed that 64 percent of voters 55 and older rejected the proposed plan when they heard the details; only 19 percent supported it. "The more seniors learn about this benefit, the more unhappy they become," says Ron Pollack, executive director of the health-care advocacy group Families USA.

The progressive agenda

The skimpy, confusing coverage is a tattered fig leaf for a wide range of destructive policies. Here progressives—including

unions, senior groups, health-care advocates and the panoply of liberal Democratic interest and constituency groups—have the opportunity to introduce legislation next year to repeal each of the flawed, pro-corporate policies. If Republicans (and their Democratic allies) resist, it will demonstrate that the plan's supporters are more interested in protecting corporate interests—which will receive \$125 billion in direct subsidies out of the \$400 billion the bill will cost over the next decade—than in providing help for seniors.

One obvious target would be to repeal the prohibition on Medicare bargaining with pharmaceutical companies to obtain lower prices, much as the Veterans Administration already does. Such bargaining is the main reason drug prices are lower in all other industrial countries, all of which have national health insurance. Additionally, Congress could mandate that importation of drugs from Canada be legal. The Republican bill leaves that decision to the Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, who said reimportation will be prohibited.

The new plan requires Medicare to contract with private plans, but if no or only one company offers a plan in an area Medicare will provide an alternative. Medicare already pays HMOs 19 percent

more for services similar to what the program provides. Under the new plan, the subsidy would increase to as much as 30 percent above Medicare costs. In addition, the new law provides \$12 billion in subsidies for private insurers to provide prescription plans—money essentially taken from help for the very poor in conference committee.

- Congressional Democrats should advocate providing prescription drugs through Medicare. When that fails, they should insist on a level playing field—no subsidies for private plans and a Medicare option everywhere.

- Progressives should push to eliminate the law's demonstration project of competition between traditional Medicare and private health plans. The new law permits the heavily subsidized private insurers to cherry pick healthier beneficiaries. That would leave traditional Medicare with higher costs, and premiums charged to Medicare participants would increase sharply. If the demonstration plan can't be eliminated, there should be no subsidies for private plans and no freedom to cherry pick participants.

- Health-care and tax reformers should support legislation to eliminate health savings accounts. Unlike all other tax-advantaged savings plans, this would permit individuals to avoid taxes both when the money is deposited and when it is withdrawn—setting a dangerous precedent conservatives are likely to push for other plans. These health savings accounts—combined with a high-deductible insurance policy—also are likely to drain relatively healthy, high-income individuals from traditional insurance pools. Employers are likely to shift away from the low-deductible plans most offer now toward this less expensive type of health plan. As a result, premiums for comprehensive, employer-based insurance for the average working person could more than double, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

- Under the duplicitous label of "cost control," the new law merges the Medicare trust funds for hospitals (now paid from payroll taxes), outpatient care (now paid by premiums and general revenue) and drugs. It arbitrarily limits gen-

eral tax revenue to 45 percent of the total cost of Medicare. As Jeanne Lambrew, a health policy expert with the Center for American Progress think tank, argues, this will trigger a Medicare crisis about a decade early. Then the law would prohibit using more progressive income taxes as a solution and leave a choice of benefit cuts, higher premiums for seniors or increased payroll taxes—all regressive options.

Minding the gaps

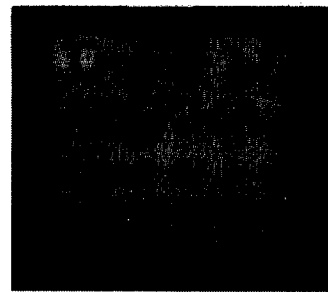
Is there much chance of passing these reforms next year? Probably not, even though the Republican prescription plan narrowly passed with extraordinary arm-twisting of hostile conservatives and capitulation by a small but crucial number of Democrats. But each battle could highlight how Republican devotion to corporate interests undermines one of the two cornerstones of the country's essential but inadequate retirement system.

Even without such pre-election confrontations, almost two-thirds of likely voters now think that Bush acts for big business and not the people, according to a poll by Democracy Corps. And that percentage is growing. Already high levels of cynicism about business—a belief that corporations are too powerful, make too much profit, and fail to balance profits and the public interest—have grown sharply in the past three years among Democrats and independents, according to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Conversely, Republicans have grown more pro-business.

Unfortunately for Democrats, several 2002 polls, reported in a recent American Enterprise Institute study, show that voters think Democrats and Republicans are both too influenced by big corporations. Democrats are seen as only slightly more likely than Republicans to reform corporations.

Despite the high level of distrust of corporations, popular opinion is often of two minds about big business—seeing it as an arrogant, abusive and corrupting power but also as a source of economic wellbeing. Politically, the key is demonstrating how the public good is undermined and the wellbeing of most individuals suffers when government fails to make corporations operate in the public interest.

Not only are jobs and income growing too slowly for most Americans to get ahead financially, but also many people are swamped with growing consumer debt, higher medical costs (as employers shift the burden to their pocket-books), cutbacks in needed local services, rising local taxes (which are highly regressive, hitting hardest on the most vulnerable) and rising tuition costs. Under the Bush administration the economic security of the great majority has declined as the economic fortune of a rich minority has increased. Democrats can turn Bush's Medicare triumph into an electoral victory if they link these two trends in the public's mind and champion the public interest and the popular majority against corporate privilege and power. ■



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Vietnam's Lingering Voices

By Kim Phillips-Fein

Near the end of the Vietnam War, as the antiwar movement roiled domestic politics and the Viet Cong showed no signs of giving in, a group of black soldiers formed an underground society named the Mau-Maus, in

Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides

By Christian G. Appy
Viking Press
608 pages, \$34.95

reference to a 19th-century uprising against the British in Kenya. Other soldiers, at about the same time, put up posters at Army bases reading, "Don't Do What They Tell You, Tell What They Do," and went on "search-and-avoid" missions—told where the enemy was, they'd march in the opposite direction. In 1971, for the Fourth of July, soldiers at one base held a peace rally, calling for "immediate and total American troop withdrawal."

These were only a few signs of an army in revolt and a foreign policy in collapse.

At home, Nixon composed his infamous list of political enemies, and used federal agencies to harass them. The "Plumbers," his secret agents, broke into the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist to find documents that might be used to smear him after he released the Pentagon Papers. Vietnam veterans threw away their medals in front of the White House. Early in the morning before an antiwar demonstration on the Washington Mall, Nixon wandered down without Secret Service men in attendance, and gave a rambling speech to the college-age protesters, telling them to travel and see the world.

Such stories of Vietnam-era unraveling—and many more—can be found in Christian Appy's *Patriots: An Oral History of the Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*. Appy has interviewed soldiers, generals, North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, antiwar protestors, politicians,

Cold Warriors, artists, poets, flight attendants, conscientious objectors, draft dodgers and more. Juxtaposing the narratives of the men who planned the war with those who fought in and against it, the deepest theme of Appy's book is the self-deception and moral blindness of American leaders, and their inability to justify the war—to American soldiers, to the general public, even to themselves.

The Vietnam War, Appy suggests, was the first war fought by a major global power against a Third World country after the decline of the old European empires, in a world irrevocably shaped by the Cuban Revolution and by nationalist movements in India and Africa, in which

they certainly didn't find a people asking to be liberated.

Patriots demonstrates that the anti-Communist theories of the war's architects blinded them to the real nature of the war in Vietnam, its horrific violence and the fact that it would not be winnable. Paul Kattenberg, a Vietnam specialist in the '50s, tells of attending a National Security Council meeting in 1963: "What struck me more than anything else was just the abysmal ignorance around the table of the particular facts of Vietnam, their ignorance of the actual place. They didn't know what they were talking about. It was robot thinking about Vietnam and no distinc-



Vietnam veterans and their families fight with Veterans Administration police during a demonstration for better care at the Wood VA Hospital, Milwaukee, 1975.

the desire of one country to control the politics of another was no longer an adequate justification for war. What's more, many of the working-class and black Americans who were drafted to fight in Vietnam were not persuaded by the anti-communist arguments of the State and Defense Departments. They did not see how the peasant country could possibly pose a threat to the United States, and

tions were being made." James Thompson, who served as an adviser to McGeorge Bundy in the early '60s, tells of authorizing "armed reconnaissance" missions without knowing what they were: "Armed reconnaissance planes basically flew up and down both halves of Vietnam and over Laos, taking pictures and shooting at anything they wanted to. Many months later I realized

I was authorizing quite a bit of killing with no knowledge of what it was all about and it staggered me."

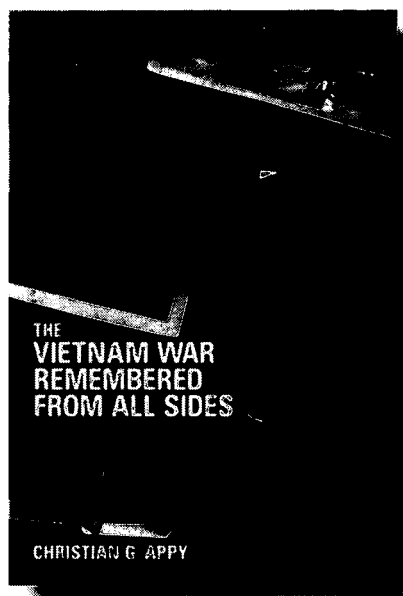
Morton Halperin, a deputy assistant secretary of defense under Johnson, refused even to have a map of Vietnam in his office until the Tet Offensive. "People would come in and they'd start to tell me something about the Mekong Delta or the Ho Chi Minh Trail and they would say, 'Where's your map of Vietnam?' I'd say, 'Use that map.' Half of them couldn't find Vietnam on the world map and the other half would say, 'Vietnam is too small on this map to show you what I want to show you.' I would look at them and say, 'That's the point!'"

Only planners possessed by illusions and contempt could have sought to win the support of a people they were in the midst of bombing (the overwhelming majority—75 percent—of American bombs fell on South Vietnam). The U.S. military strategy sought to break the will of the Vietnamese communists, not by seizing territory but by killing as many people as possible. One adviser remembers Kissinger saying, "Every country, like every human being, has a breaking point, Vietnam included." Yet while pursuing an inhumane strategy that could lead all too easily to the massacre of noncombatants, the Americans were supposed to be protecting the Vietnamese from the cruelties of Communism.

Almost every page in Appy's book reveals a different contradiction in U.S. policy: Hospitals bombed instead of military installations; starvation in the strategic hamlets that were supposed to be incubators of support for the South Vietnamese government; battles waged along with supposed Vietnamese allies who turned out to be double agents. In one particularly dubious psychological-warfare operation, peasants were kidnapped and taken to an outpost of a fake Northern resistance movement, named the Sacred Sword of the Patriot League, where they were given propaganda and food and sent back to their villages. The program was never shown to have any positive results.

Many American soldiers found themselves incapable of tolerating the war's inhumanity, and the army was collapsing by the war's end. One journalist who lived in Vietnam in the early '70s says, "When I hear people say we could have won the war, I always think: Where were you going

to get the soldiers?" Yet while the American soldiers served one-year tours of duty, punctuated by rest-and-recuperation debauchery, often spending time in rear-area bases with televisions, slot machines,



beer, hot showers and warm meals, the North Vietnamese soldiers endured vast deprivation, living in the jungle for years on end, with scant food, sickness, exhaustion and a death rate nearly 20 times that of the Americans. Why were they able to tolerate such conditions, where American soldiers crumbled under much less?

Appy suggests that the basic difference was that North Vietnamese soldiers understood themselves as fighting a political war against an occupying power.

When I hear people say we could have won the war, I always think: 'Where were you going to get the soldiers?'

North Vietnamese strategy, therefore, involved building support for resistance to the Americans (and before them, the French) throughout Vietnamese society. For example, Vo Nguyen Giap, a leader of the anti-colonial struggle against the French and a general in the American War (as it is called in Vietnam), remem-

bers Ho Chi Minh telling him that as long as they had the support of the peasantry, weaponry was unimportant. Artists, entertainers, actors, singers and musicians traveled with the North Vietnamese troops.

At the same time, the North Vietnamese military planners made a deep effort (perhaps not always successful) to identify with America's revolutionary tradition, and to blame the planners of the war, not the grunts. According to Appy's sources, North Vietnamese soldiers read American literature, carrying books by U.S. authors among the few items in their rucksacks. In short, the North Vietnamese army endured because it sought to give its soldiers a sense of being participants in a deep struggle against injustice, arbitrary power and violence.

It is impossible to read *Patriots* without thinking of the ongoing war in Iraq. Despite obvious differences—no force in Iraq is comparable to the Viet Cong and Saddam Hussein was no Ho Chi Minh—there are deep similarities in the American position. The war, after all, was supposed to vanquish the "Vietnam syndrome."

But can it? Once again the United States has entered a war on false pretenses with little knowledge of the history, culture or even language of the invaded country. American leaders now, as during the Vietnam War, seek political support among a people they just bombed, seeking to win the "hearts and minds" of Iraqis after killing 8,000 to 10,000 civilians. The soldiers, once more, are working-class men and women, many of color, quite a few of whom seem already to harbor grave doubts about the war they have been sent to fight.

The similarities may run deeper still. No matter what military superiority the United States may possess, it is not so easy to win a war. The Vietnam War was possible, in the end, because the people leading the United States were motivated by a criminal, casual sense that the world was theirs to rule. Yet as *Patriots* shows, they were mistaken. Ideology and politics matter in fighting wars, and a war justified by lies is unlikely to be a war that people will want to—or prove able to—fight for long. ■

Kim Phillips-Fein is a writer in New York City and a contributing editor to In These Times. She is working on a book about the business backlash against the New Deal. She would like to thank Gregory Vargo for contributing to this review.

Border Crossings

By Todd Lillethun

Once in a while, a group of films suddenly arrive all sharing the same topic. Though film distributors try to prevent this at all costs, when it happens, the audience has a rare chance to see an issue addressed from different

In This World

Directed by Michael Winterbottom

Spare Parts

Directed by Damjan Kozole

Distant Lights

Directed by Hans-Christian Schmid

Beyond Borders

Directed by Martin Campbell

angles. Refugees are the focus of four films released this year: *In This World* from the United Kingdom, *Spare Parts* from Slovenia, *Distant Lights* from Germany, and *Beyond Borders* from the United States. Each features harrowing trials of displaced persons and the quixotic lifestyles they adopt in order to survive. Starvation, terror, sickness and death are commonplace, and the refugees entrust their destinies, sometimes fatally, to the hands of strangers. By the end of each of these movies, a feeling of isolation sets in for the audience, making "home" seem like an island of safety amidst a vast, ominous planet.

The films portray refugees in varying ways: as resilient survivors, helpless victims and even scheming opportunists. Similarly, the people who help them are shown as heroes, exploiters or simple working-class citizens. In one film the refugees occupy the foreground as main characters, in another they are part of an ensemble, and in two they are relegated to the background, having only a handful of lines. Although these films do not share country of origin or destination, they all portray the plight of refugees as part of a pervasive world crisis.

In This World

Michael Winterbottom is an accomplished director whose style and focus change according to his subject. His film uses a *cinema vérité* documentary style in

following two young Afghan refugees on their journey to London. Though the story is fictional, it is based on true events. The actors, refugees themselves, improvise throughout the film; Winterbottom captures their reactions as they are led into one situation after another, some pre-planned and some not.

The style of the film is so brisk that the logic and meaning in any given scene are often not apparent until after the scene has ended. We are hurtled along the Silk Road into an unforgiving terrain that often goes unexplained and unguided. Tourist signposts are gone, and culture shock reigns for an hour and a half before the enormity of

favours, and often end up killing their charges by packing them too tightly in car trunks.

Such occupational hazards are presented as par for the course; still, the men see themselves as angels in disguise. Ludvik, the lead smuggler, is a widower and alcoholic. He becomes a father figure to Rudi, a young protégé who idolized him in his former racing life. Their difficult relationship manages to squeak a few bright moments out of the sad landscape. Krsko, the town where the film takes place, is home to the only nuclear power plant in the former Yugoslavia. Impotence and cancer run high among the locals, and Ludvik drinks his own piss to get his cancer under control. He grooms Rudi to take over "the business," and in the end Ludvik's protégé must decide for himself how much of the job's burden and ethics are his own.



In *Spare Parts*, smugglers trade sexual favors, swindle and even kill their charges.

the journey becomes clear. The film itself is a marvel of circumstance. The crew often shot guerrilla-style without permits and under the radar of government sanction in Iran, Italy, Pakistan and Turkey.

Spare Parts

Director Damjan Kozole is a veteran punk rocker from Slovenia whose film focuses on drunk, corrupt and depressed smugglers who reminisce about their former lives as race car drivers as they ferry terrified human cargo across the Croatian border to Italy. They swindle refugees out of their money (charging \$50 for a pizza), sexually exploit women in exchange for

Distant Lights

In Hans-Christian Schmid's film, the Oder River between Frankfurt, Germany and Sublice, Poland is the featured border, the division between the prosperous west and the impoverished east. As in *Spare Parts*, the ferrymen here are unscrupulous, charging inordinate sums for tremendous danger and no guarantees that refugees will arrive safely.

Distant Lights interweaves eight narratives that reference border-crossing figuratively or metaphorically. One storyline follows a Ukrainian couple attempting to cross over. Creeping through the woods along the river's edge, they follow a group

of other refugees into a botched defection scheme and narrowly escape capture. A poor local man desperate for money hides them in his garage without his wife's knowledge and agrees to help the couple, though he is neither savvy nor skillful enough to take such a risk. Meanwhile, a fellow refugee is captured but finds luck at the Border Patrol Interrogation Office when his interpreter takes pity on him and eventually agrees to help.

In both of these stories, the relationship between helper and traveler is compromised. Mercy and ruthlessness change hands, guilt and innocence are a matter of chance, and freedom comes in varying shades of gray.

Beyond Borders

In stark contrast to these films comes this stateside tale of a wealthy society woman

Mercy and ruthlessness change hands, guilt and innocence are a matter of chance, and freedom comes in varying shades of gray.

Commissioner for Refugees. Her work reunites her with Callahan in Cambodia in 1989, where after a harrowing episode with the Khmer Rouge, they declare their love but realize the impossibility of it surviving amidst all the tragedy. Six years later, Callahan goes missing in Chechnya, and Sara sets out to find him.

By far the most widely seen of the four films, *Beyond Borders* was a financial and

all their sincerity, undermined an honest portrayal of the world's disenfranchised, especially when one has played Lara Croft twice, and the other has the looks and charisma of James Bond. It doesn't help that director Martin Campbell retains his feel for globetrotting action films in every scene (his previous films include *The Mask of Zorro*, *GoldenEye* and *No Escape*).

Still, for all the studio trappings, it is difficult to argue with the film's good intentions. Without getting into geopolitics, it presents an unflinchingly detailed account of starvation and death that in most instances overwhelms the romance. The characters' love for each other and love for their mission are explicitly connected, and while that may smack of narrative gamesmanship on the studio's part, it may have been considered a means to sell a very bleak movie to a mass audience.

The problem is not the romance, but that Hollywood does not trust its audience enough to make a film about real refugees, to present them as people in specific contexts and not just as victims. Instead, Hollywood settles for self-serving stories about conflicted humanitarians who nurse the national image of the United States as world benefactor. When Callahan crashes a charity ball that Sara attends and accuses its sponsor of corporate greed and racism, the corporation in question is British, and the danger of the film invoking anti-Americanism is conveniently sidestepped.

The chance that *Beyond Borders* might spur interest in the other three films is remote. It's the most depressing of the bunch. Even as bleak as *Spare Parts* is, the end of that film works up to some kind of hope. In *This World* and *Distant Lights* are, as their titles suggest, circular in their conclusion that the destination never really comes and people forever wander the globe without settling.

The film that stands out from all four, however, is *Distant Lights*. By effectively tying the plight of refugees to the daily lives of natural citizens, Schmid leaves us with a less isolated sense of "home" and a more personal connection to the characters. The film presents all the stories and characters so evenhandedly that easy choices of whose side to take are difficult to make. In the end we empathize with everyone. ■

Todd Lillethun is a writer and filmmaker in Chicago.



Hans-Christian Schmid's *Distant Lights* ties the plight of refugees to the lives of natural citizens.

who is transformed into a humanitarian aid worker. Sara Jordan (Angelina Jolie) is a pampered, insular American who makes her home in London. While on a relief mission in Ethiopia in 1985, she picks up an emaciated boy lying on the roadside and begs Nick Callahan (Clive Owen), a bitter activist doctor, to save him. Callahan snubs her at first, saying the boy is practically dead already. She pleads, he relents, and the boy's recovery is the romantic glue that bonds.

After a few weeks she returns to her prosaic life in London, but the plight of the starving and sick haunts her, and she starts a job with the United Nations High

critical failure. It grossed only \$4.4 million domestically and closed within a month. Most reviewers compared it unfavorably to *In This World*, which earned only \$84,000 in the United States (in limited release—it took in much more overseas) despite winning the Golden Bear Award for Best Film at the Berlin Film Festival. *Spare Parts* and *Distant Lights* do not yet have U.S. distributors, but also have garnered accolades overseas and were produced on limited budgets.

The studio machine behind *Beyond Borders* might have been, in part, what doomed the film. Hiring beautiful stars like Angelina Jolie and Clive Owen, for

Byrd's book (14 bound speeches) is urgently worth reading. But if, at the end of his funeral oration for Roman self-government, the interested citizen remains unmoved—unconvinced that the American republic is threatened by incipient tyranny—he might be fortunate enough to be persuaded in person by the 86-year-old Democrat in his spacious Capitol office. Which is where I found Byrd in late October, fresh from another in a yearlong series of utterly remarkable speeches denouncing the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq and an ongoing "policy based largely on propaganda, hype and prevarication."

Addressing his colleagues on October 17, Byrd outdid himself rhetorically—and came as close to losing his temper as his deeply engrained courtliness will permit. Railing against the \$87 billion supplemental appropriations bill for occupation and "reconstruction" in Iraq, the dean of the Senate reprised the fairy tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes," to illustrate how the country was marched into war by a Praetorian guard of confidence men egged on by a president's vanity—and how the con game persists.

"We were frightened with visions of mushroom clouds, but they turned out to be only vapors of the mind," Byrd thundered. "We were told that major combat was over, but 101 [179 as of Nov. 20] Americans have died in combat since that proclamation from the deck of an aircraft carrier by our very own emperor in his new clothes. Our emperor says that we are not occupiers, yet we show no inclination to relinquish the country of Iraq to its people."

Byrd has been speaking since September last year to a largely empty chamber, ignored by his war-fevered Republican colleagues and most of his "sheep-like" Democratic ones, as well as their handmaidens in the media. But this time his scathing eloquence hit home, provoking a rejoinder—at once nasty and ignorant—from Sen. Ted Stevens, Republican chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

"Think of the young men and women in Iraq ... They get [your speech] on C-SPAN," Stevens growled. "Think of what they are thinking when a senator says they are over there because of a

falsehood, because the president of United States lied. ... Those who vote against this bill will be voting against supporting our men and women in the field." Unsurprisingly, Stevens expressed child-like faith in the president's fairy tale. Unsurprisingly, Byrd took umbrage at such a "canard."

"Let the record not stand with the senator's words ... that those who vote against this bill are voting against the troops," Byrd replied. "I defy that statement ... and hurl it back into the teeth of the senator from Alaska. ... There are millions of people out there ... there are many men and women in Iraq who believe that we who vote against this bill today speak for them. ... Yes, I voted against sending troops into Iraq. Yes, I am one of the 23. And if I had it to do over again, I would vote the same way again—10 times, 10 times a hundred against this doctrine of preemptive strikes. Fie on that doctrine! Fie on it!"

This time the senior senator from West Virginia was one of 12 to vote no. Two weeks later, on November 3, when the final version of the appropriation came to a voice vote, Byrd's was the only audible dissent heard in the Senate chamber. Classical to the end, he termed the bill's passage a "pyrrhic victory" for the administration.

A more sedate Byrd received me, but the anger still smoldered. The Senate "lost its way" when it passed the war authorization bill on October 11, 2002, in direct contravention of the intent of the "forefathers." S.J. Res. 46, as Byrd still refers to it, was unconstitutional because it handed over Congress' war-declaring power to the president, who henceforth became war legislator and war commander. "[This] pernicious doctrine of preemption cannot be constitutional because the framers thought it was wise to put the making of war and the declaring of war in different hands," he said. "Therefore, they put the power to declare war ... in the Congress, so that such a momentous decision could not be by one man but by many. We placed the declaring of war in the hands of one individual. Out of 275 million, one man was to declare war. ... The lives of untold thousands men and women were placed in that one man's hands. The framers would have been really disturbed if they'd have been here."

Classifieds

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And they would have been horrified by the Senate's decline as an institution. The passage of S.J. Res. 46 "represented more than just intimidation and fear of reprisal at the polls," he said. Senators had "lost this quality of pride and dedication—to something that's higher than politics, than Bush being elected and re-elected—the higher goal of service to the nation, the recognition of the Senate's place [as] the bedrock of the constitutional system."

By contrast, "Roman senators served without pay. They believed that service to the state was of the highest order" and they were deeply proud to be Roman citizens. Today's U.S. senators are no longer grounded in the classics of Greek and Roman literature, or even the Federalist Papers, and thus lack "a deeper feel of what makes the senator in the Senate."

"They're very bright, well read as to current events," Byrd said of the younger generation. "And they're quick on their toes—they come up with the 10-second sound bytes, whereas, it takes me several minutes to say howdy. I try to think before I speak."

Along with reflection, civility has declined. When the unrepentant Byrd was sworn in to the "more genteel" Senate of 1959, "there was not so much the partisan bitterness, not so much the fighting, the slash and burn that you find today. Those senators were here because they wanted to be senators, not because they wanted to be president."

And they took more seriously the Senate's constitutional responsibility to debate (at length) and amend (at will) bills sent up from the House of Representatives. Byrd was outraged that the war resolution passed, not only with so little discussion but lacking a sunset provision that would have forced Bush to return to Congress for re-authorization. Byrd's 12-month sunset amendment garnered 31 votes: "That was absolutely amazing that senators, especially Democratic senators, would vote against sunseting the provision. I think [they] were intimidated by the false cry of being seen as unpatriotic."

Byrd understands the danger of open-ended war resolutions.

Having been misled into voting for Lyndon Johnson's fraudulent Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964, he wasn't going to be fooled again. S.J. Res. 46 was even worse, he said, because the Tonkin Gulf authorization specified Congress' right to terminate military action.

In all this fawning deference to Bush, Byrd sees "a kind of subliminal hero worship or feeling that the White House and the occupant thereof are clothed with the vestigial remnants of royalty." To Byrd, "the president is just another hired hand, like I am." Under the Constitution, "the Senate can send him packing, but the president cannot send the senators packing."

That's just what the tyrants Julius Caesar and Mark Antony did to the Roman Senate. And if the fall of republican Rome is any guide, then the American republic is in grave danger.

It's no coincidence that Byrd's rhetorical tour de force on Iraq bears a strong resemblance to the speeches of Cicero, who also viewed himself as the principal defender of the Senate as institutional bulwark against a military usurper. Eight days before Caesar crossed the Rubicon, Antony, as tribune, vetoed a proposal to declare Caesar a public enemy if he refused to disband his army. "You rejected all efforts to open negotiations with you about upholding the authority of the House," Cicero wrote in the most famous of his Philippics against Antony. "Yet the matter at stake was nothing less than your itch to plunge the whole country into anarchy and desolation. ... You, Antony, were the man who provided the pretext for this most catastrophic of wars."

"Vote to save your country," Byrd exhorted his colleagues when he clashed with Stevens. "No commander in chief brought me here, and no commander in chief is going to send me home. My first and last stand by which I live and by which I hope to die is this Constitution of the United States."

Antony had Cicero murdered for his defiance. Byrd and his ilk are being killed by silence. ■

John R. MacArthur is the publisher of Harper's Magazine and author of *The Selling of Free Trade* (University of California, 2001).

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OF SENATORS & FRAMERS

By JOHN R. MACARTHUR

The cramped gift shop on the Senate side of the U.S. Capitol sells only one book by a serving senator—a slim, red volume misleadingly titled *The Senate of the Roman Republic*. Misleading because its author, U.S. Sen. Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, composed it not as straightforward history but as a cautionary tale about the death of the Roman republic—a story of self-inflicted decline intended by Byrd to galvanize Americans into defending their constitutional treasures.

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